

TONY RIZZI

Work Hard, Don't Lie, And Try Not To Hurt Anybody

Exhibition Duration: **19 September 2026 – 17 January 2027**

Opening: **Friday, 18 September 2026, 7.00 pm**

Venue: **Fotografie Forum Frankfurt**

Frankfurt am Main, 18 September 2026

"Now I begin my life in Frankfurt. I really like it here and feel like I should be here. I feel like there's a protective presence by my side at all times...strange. WORK HARD, DON'T LIE, AND TRY NOT TO HURT ANYONE." - Excerpt from Tony Rizzi's diary (September 7th, 1985)

*This quote frames the most comprehensive exhibition to date of the renowned US-American dancer, choreographer, and photographic artist Tony Rizzi (*1965, USA).*

For the first time, this exhibition offers deeper insight into Rizzi's intuitive photographic practice to date. From his early black-and-white photographs and distinctive Polaroids and photo collages to his recent video works. His oeuvre on display demonstrates the versatility of his artistic practice.

When Tony Rizzi joined William Forsythe's Ballett Frankfurt he stepped into a city whose motto was "Culture for Everyone" and where experimentation in arts and international exchange was treasured. As a dancer and choreographer travelling the world, photography became another creative process to connect with others in his daily life. Comprised of portraits, performances, lovers, family and queer communities, his photographs reflect Rizzi's obsession of being in the moment.

With his rarely known black-and-white photographs from the 1980s and 1990s, we glimpse behind the scenes of Ballet Frankfurt and view performances as well as personal experiences; we encounter pieces of history. At the same time, the deep sense of connection and care within this dance community remains tangible to this day. Rizzi's photographs reveal personal relationships with lovers, friends, and colleagues, both at home and on tour. They include numerous self-portraits, ironic and playful moments, as well as emotionally charged situations in which existential questions are reflected, including his experience of living with AIDS. The vibrant LGBTQIA+ scene and everyday life in Frankfurt also find their place in his work.

Fleeting encounters — parties, erotic moments, laughable breakdowns and the fear of loss and death — are transformed into images of remarkable intimacy. In doing so, the personal becomes intertwined with fundamental questions about community and how we

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live together. Celina Lunsford, curator of the exhibition, writes in her catalogue essay: "Each impulse to photograph is an eye, brain, heart moment. The multiple compositions are expressions of becoming. For Tony Rizzi performance and photography are similar in that they incite engagement with the human condition, provide emotional connection, and hold on to what has occurred and those who were present."

An important chapter in Tony Rizzi's photographic work is devoted to his family, above all to his personal and artistic relationship with his mother, Verna. She not only stood alongside Rizzi as an actress in his dance piece "Snowman Sinking", which premiered at Frankfurt's Künstlerhaus Mousonturm in 2000, but also repeatedly became the subject of his photographs – most recently in 2026 for a large-scale collage. Both works are included in the exhibition.

Inspired by the artist's apartment in Frankfurt's Bahnhofsviertel, the curator selected two important rooms to recreate as part of the exhibition. The installation "Living Room", consisting of more than 6,000 Polaroids, is being presented publicly for the first time. And Tony Rizzi's kitchen acts as a kind of autobiographical exhibition space that tells stories from Rizzi's life including his passion for cooking.

"Tony will charm you. He will draw you in. One way or another, he will capture your attention. He is funny, inquisitive, perceptive, endlessly curious, and instinctively knows how to make you look again." What Tamàs Gèza Moricz, a former dancer of Ballett Frankfurt, describes in his essay as a personal quality becomes an artistic attitude in Rizzi's photographs: the urge to look more closely, to experience the moment in all its intensity, and to preserve what has been experienced in an image.

For the project **TONY RIZZI: WORK HARD, DON'T LIE, AND TRY NOT TO HURT ANYBODY**, Celina Lunsford conducted extensive research into the artist's archive of more than 10,000 images and conceived the exhibition in close collaboration with Tony Rizzi.

PUBLICATION

Accompanying the exhibition is the artist's first monograph. Released as a limited edition, the publication brings together photographic works from 1986 to the present, alongside texts by William Forsythe, Celina Lunsford, Tamàs Gèza Moricz, and Tony Rizzi. The book was designed by Studio Markus Weisbeck, Frankfurt.

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TONY RIZZI (*1965 in Dedham, Massachusetts as James Anthony Rizzi) trained at the Boston Ballet School under legendary dancers Violette Verdy and Bruce Wells. In 1985, he moved to Frankfurt, where he was a dancer and close collaborator with William Forsythe/Ballett Frankfurt for over 20 years, performing many of the leading roles. From 1999 to 2023, he performed as a main protagonist in productions by Troubleyn/Jan Fabre including the 24-hour performance "Mount Olympus." In 2012, he played the young Marina Abramović in Robert Wilson's "The Life and Death of Marina Abramović." With his own company, Tony Rizzi and the Bad Habits, he has created his own dance productions since 2000. He premieres regularly at the Mousonturm and the Gallus Theater in Frankfurt am Main and tours to Montreal, Vienna, Tokyo, New York, Berlin and Oslo. In 2025, he was nominated as Best Dancer in Europe in the annual critics' survey by TANZ magazine.

Since the late 1980s, Rizzi has been active as a photographic artist, exhibiting at Platform Sarai, the Frankfurter Kunstverein, Opera Frankfurt, Fotografie Forum Frankfurt, Kunstverein Hamburg, MUMOK in Vienna and the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo. His works are collected worldwide.

SUPPORTING PROGRAMME

SAT, 19 Sep, 3.00 pm **GALLERY TOUR** with TONY RIZZI, CELINA LUNSFORD and ANDREA HORVAY

FRI, 23 Oct, 6.00 pm **TALK** "BALLETT FRANKFURT AND THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL CHOREOGRAPHY" with STEVE VALK and TONY RIZZI

SAT/SUN, 31 Oct/1 Nov, 10.00 am–2.00 pm **WORKSHOP** "THE MOVEMENT IN OURSELVES AND OTHERS: GESTURES, BODY LANGUAGE AND MOVING IN FRONT OF THE CAMERA" with TONY RIZZI

WED, 4 Nov, 6.00 pm **TALK** "LET'S TALK ABOUT COCK" with SNEŽANA GOLUBOVIĆ and TONY RIZZI

TUE, 29 Sep, 20 Oct, 24 Nov 2026 and 12 Jan 2027, 3.00 pm **CURATOR'S TOURS** with CELINA LUNSFORD or ANDREA HORVAY

TUE, 3 Nov; SUN, 6 Dec; THU, 14 Jan 2027, 11.00 am–6.00 pm **TONY IS IN THE HOUSE**
– meet the artist in the exhibition

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RECOMMENDATIONS from the **FFF ACADEMY**

FRI, 25 Sep, 6.00 pm **LECTURE** "SPECULATION AND COLLABORATION: DOCUMENTARY PRACTICE BETWEEN TRUTH AND FICTION" with **MAX PINCKERS**

FRI-MON, 25-28 Sep, 10.00 am-5.00 pm **MASTERCLASS WORKSHOP** "SPECULATIVE DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY" with **MAX PINCKERS**

SAT, 10 Oct, 2.00-5.30 pm **CITY-WALK-WORKSHOP** "EYES ON FRANKFURT - TRACING TRACES" with **MARKUS SEIBEL**

PUBLIC GUIDED TOURS every Wednesday, 5.00 pm

OPENING HOURS Tue-Sun 11.00 am-6.00 pm, MON closed

Entry regular 8 Euros, reduced 5 Euros

Press information and press photos for the exhibition **TONY RIZZI: WORK HARD, DON'T LIE, AND TRY NOT TO HURT ANYBODY** at the Fotografie Forum Frankfurt are available for download at: www.fff Frankfurt.org/presse

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Dr. Marschner Stiftung

further supported by
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FOTOGRAFIE FORUM FRANKFURT

The Fotografie Forum Frankfurt (FFF) is one of the leading centres of photography in Europe. As an exhibition space, institution and event forum, the FFF deals with all aspects of photography. Since its founding in 1984 it has presented over 300 exhibitions with historic and contemporary photographers and artists. Additionally, the programme of the FFF ACADEMY comprises regular workshops, talks and discussions with internationally renowned photographers, artists and experts. Fotografie Forum Frankfurt is the organizing partner of the international RAY Triennial of Photography, which takes place in various exhibition venues in Frankfurt/Rhine-Main. Further information available at www.fff Frankfurt.org.

The Fotografie Forum Frankfurt is supported by the Förderkreis Fotografie Forum Frankfurt e.V., the City of Frankfurt am Main, Crespo Foundation, Henryk Sznep and Bethmann HAL.



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BLACK AND WHITE

I've been taking photographs since I was a teenager at the Boston ballet school. I really preferred black and white photos to color photos because it allowed the viewer to stimulate their imagination. When I got to Frankfurt, I started seeing all these new things in my life, this wonderful company with these amazing dancers and artists and I tried to capture the colorfulness of everyone but without any color.

There was so much that went on in my time with Ballett Frankfurt and photographing was a way of remembering those people, remembering that time so I just started snapping away like crazy.

Some of my favorite pictures are posed ones like the one of Tamás Moricz standing behind a mannequin and creating funny situations, or the woman with the little spoon underneath her breast on a stack of plates; another picture that I love very much is of Herbert with a cigarette as if he's sucking the cigarette through his ear but he's blowing the smoke out of his mouth.

Cedric in the Mountains, Malersaal Oper Frankfurt | 1994 | Polaroid Collage

Stephen Galloway, a dancer in Ballett Frankfurt was using Polaroids, and loved how they popped out of the camera. I thought to myself that there is so much more in a room that's happening than just a single photograph and that's why I started making collages. There was also an advertisement for a performance called "Pizza Girl" and the poster was a bunch of Polaroids in a collage of the dancer Amanda Miller. This also sparked the idea in my head to go farther than just making single Polaroids of people. My first collage was of course of someone that I found very attractive. It was a young man that was in the audience at Montpellier and after the performance we met and had dinner and then he came to visit me in Frankfurt. I wanted to capture the playfulness and the beauty of this person and his wonderful body, so I decided to put him into the 'Malersaal,' the place where we painted the sets for performances. And my first collage "Cedric" was created.

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Andreas in His Bedroom | 1998 | Polaroid Collage

I like this collage of Andreas in the bedroom where he is lying down on the bed, but he is also doing other things in the room like rolling a joint or choosing a record. I would take a lot of pictures in that situation. Maybe a week later I try to put them back together to form an idea of what happened in that room. I loved that the Polaroid camera was in my hand also in that room. I felt like it was a kind of "Ménage-à-trois" between myself and the subject matter and I just felt like I had a better sense of time and space by making collages.

LIVING ROOM

Installation with more than 6,000 Polaroids

The big question: Why the hell would you want to put your whole life in your living room filling the walls with everything? It's all part of me and it stayed up in my living room for about five years. I loved it when people would come over and just get lost in the images. Not all of them are great, but I think a combination of wonderful and not wonderful is part of my life and everybody's life. I also call it my "life room". I guess my obsessive-compulsive disorder kicked in when put it all together.

In FFF I decided to bring in some concentrated collages so that things kind of popped out and make you focus better allowing you then to look more deeply into the single polaroids.

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MY MOTHER

Last Portrait of My Mother | 2026 | Photo collage

The new collages started with the image of my mother Verna. My sisters had called and said to get home quickly that she was dying. She couldn't really speak due to her dementia, so there was a lot of communication with the eyes. I stayed in that room for seven days and started photographing her thinking this is the last time. My mother who also was a kind of muse to me and was in a few of my performances. Her way of being really inspired me to create work and I was looking at these images on my phone that I took of her and realized that they could be like my Polaroid collages. Since I'm not satisfied with the Polaroid film nowadays I have made with digital pictures and then enlarged them. This is just a tryout with copy shop paper and I think the picture of Verna is very beautiful. It is so fragile because of the paper – the thin copy paper.

Hannelore Kraus, Frankfurt am Main | 2026 | Photo collage

My apartment and my legendary house that I live in, is called "House of the Guardian Angel" which was owned by Hannelore Kraus. She is considered the Jeanne d' Arc of Frankfurt. In 1985 the highest skyscraper in Europe on the Karlsruher Straße was planned and she was the only one that refused to let them build because she was afraid that it would ruin the diversity of the area. She refused millions to allow them to build it. She had a really strong moral compass, and I wanted to honor her after she passed away.

She described herself as the Little Prince and I couldn't believe that she had mentioned that to me when we were sitting in the garden talking because I literally had a costume of the Little Prince hanging in my hallway. I photographed her in that beautiful garden that we have in the back of the house. In the collage other people are included holding pictures of her as the Little Prince. She always used to say to me "do not let the assholes bring you down." She also used to end every conversation with "Immer nach vorne, immer nach vorne, Herr Rizzi". (Always forward, always forward, Mr. Rizzi).

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Eric | 2026 | Photo collage | Prototype

Since Frau Kraus has passed on, I wanted to honor the house. I thought about my roommate Eric who I've lived with for a long time. He is an opera singer and an actor and has a very unique side of the apartment all to himself. I wanted to bring this chaos somehow together – the chaos of his workspace and showing the serenity of his loft bed where it must be so quiet up there looking down on the chaos of his life that he enjoys so much. So many people are afraid of chaos and other people just revel in it.

These are the new collages that are stemming from my life in the Karlsruher Straße 5.

Andreas Dying Hair | 1998/2026 | Enlargement of a Polaroid Collage | Archival Inkjet print mounted on alu dibond

When I was twenty-seven years old, I met my first muse, Andreas Baumecker at a club along the river Main that Hans Romanov had organized. It was on a boat, and I was fascinated by the way Andreas moved and we slowly became friends and then lovers. I was fascinated about how he lived his life. It was so different from how I grew up and how I looked at things. He was like a Buddha to me, and I started photographing him in all different situations. Our relationship influenced my performances or inspired me to create performances reflecting on our relationship – all the positive of it and also the negative of it. Bless him for letting me photograph him in so many situations. One of my favorite pictures of him is when I was on tour in Greifswald and he was there with me – actually in the performance with me. He was dying his hair red, and I took these pictures of him with his ripped underwear holding this rubber glove.

I started playing with the idea of blowing up the Polaroids large. For me, he looks like Michelangelo's David with those piercing eyes and looking to the future.

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THE KITCHEN

My beautiful apartment is my atelier and it's the place where all my ideas come from, especially my kitchen. The kitchen is a real place where things are discussed, and things come to my mind about what I want to do.

As I ride my bike towards my home, I have this sense that it's a real safe place for me. Many people have stayed in that apartment over the years, and they all feel like it's a safe place.

Here, produced as a tablecloth you can see a reproduction of the big collage called "Fuck 1997" because that was a bad year in my life. I went into a very dark place and of course I knew I would never commit suicide although I felt it and decided to create this collage of me and my kitchen. Somehow everything was falling apart and so it's done in the way where the walls are opening up in the kitchen. Originally, I wanted to have like seven different ways like the seven deadly sins – seven ways of me trying to commit suicide in the kitchen. In the end I chose just myself with a knife but as a pregnant woman. I felt there was still so much life inside of me, but I didn't want to continue with it. Then instead of going into the dark place I decided to make a piece of art about it, to get the shit out of my head.

FAMILY AND ANCESTRY

Family, ancestry, where I came from, the DNA from family members that's inside me – people that I never even met before, my great great great great great grandfathers or mothers that's a big part of my work.

I always feel like I'm trying to keep memories alive, keep people alive, keep their essence alive. My family spreads out to include the group of family members that aren't blood family members but part of my circle of friends – as gay men our ex boyfriends become part of our family, as the great Penny Arcade once said: "if it wasn't for ex boyfriends I'd have no friends." I feel like all of those people are like one big family. I just think it's all about connectedness.

There's a beautiful picture in the kitchen of my grandmother and grandfather that my aunt made. My grandmother all proud is holding a pie that she baked, and my grandfather is in his sweaty t-shirt sitting at the table after a long day of working hard so that they could afford to pay for my father's education.

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FILMS

NNNN (Georg Reischel, Ander Zabala, Cyril Baldy, Amancio Ganzdez) William Forsythe/Ballett Frankfurt | 2003 | Video | 5:24

This film is from William Forsythe's performance called "NNNN" with four foreigners performing. This was the last year of Ballett Frankfurt and the original working title was "You all must think we're just a bunch of fucking clowns." It was also the last performances of the company in Paris and I wanted to capture this but I needed to make it my own. I used the mirror image to create a playful performance in a different way. As in the working title the movement is so playful and the sound of the piece – the grunting and breathing – are like when people are having sex. Choreographers always say that the hardest part is how do you get the dancers on stage and off stage. I thought this effect is so beautiful because the dancers just appear out of the darkness, miraculously without having to walk in or pulled in or be dragged off.

Tree | 2001 | Video | 4:43

The trees are dancing in my backyard. I wanted to use this in a performance, and I wanted to film myself dancing in mirror image in my beautiful garden in the Karlsruher Straße 5. Then I was looking at the footage and noticed the tree kind of moved in the back and said to myself once again forget what you want. The tree is dancing. The tree is more interesting.

Ocean (Daniel Chait, Irene Klein) | 2015 | Video | 3:42

For years I have gone to the island of Ischia where my family originally comes from. I always imagined looking down to this one spot of the island and seeing the dancer Irene Klein floating and dancing in the water. For my 50th birthday a bunch of friends and family were on the island and I decided to film both Irene Klein and Daniel Chait for a performance that I knew I was going to be creating called "Same Old Set, Different Show."

The waves were too rough that in the end the footage wasn't what I wanted. I was so upset – it was just them falling around on the rocks trying to float – not just staying afloat like I wanted. So, I meditated. When I came out of the meditation, I realized: "fuck what you

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want Rizzi, what do you have?" Then I thought, let me make a film of them struggling to survive in rough times. Whether it is about relationships or just about the situation. There's a great lesson for everyone: "fuck what you want, use what you have."

Avenues (Inma Rubio Tomàs, Tony Rizzi) | 2002 | Video | 1:25:35

"Avenues" is a film from the performance that I did in my apartment where it was started out as a photo exhibition and then slowly turned into a performance. The theme was 'how do you turn a bad situation into a good situation?' and the work was called "I Am Open and Receptive to New Avenues of Income".

I was realizing for the first time that I should start trying to make money with my visual arts.

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Tony Rizzi, Rehearsal Artifact (Isabel Gerber, Uschi Schwarz, Jennifer Grisette), William Forsythe / Ballett Frankfurt, 1986

© Tony Rizzi, 2026



Tony Rizzi, Skinny (Douglas Becker, Isabel Gerber, Rafaële Giovanola, Wendy Beckwith, Irene Klein), William Forsythe / Amanda Miller / Ballett Frankfurt, 1986

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Tony Rizzi, Kate Strong, Tränen des Vaterlands, Heiner Goebells / Christoph Nell / Ballett Frankfurt, 1987

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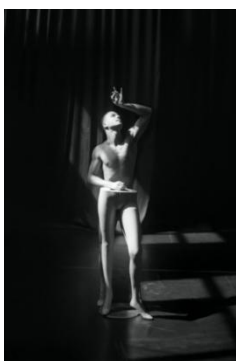
Tony Rizzi, Life in a Trash Can, 1989

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Tony Rizzi, Grandma Caruso with the Glasses, 1992

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Tony Rizzi, Tamàs in Antwerp, 1993

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Tony Rizzi, Shoulder Blades, 1994

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Tony Rizzi, Beth and Inma, 1995

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Tony Rizzi, Detail, 1995

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Tony Rizzi, Noah in Vienna, 1995

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Tony Rizzi, An Accident, 1996

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Tony Rizzi, Self Portrait by Refrigerator, 1997

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**Tony Rizzi, Mae West Glowing Icons Jan Fabre /
Trobelyn, 1997**

© Tony Rizzi, 2026



Tony Rizzi, Tim and Dana, 2000

© Tony Rizzi, 2026



**Tony Rizzi, Emi and Kazu rehearse Steptext –
Dancers in Japan, Star Dancers Ballet, 2001**

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Tony Rizzi, Gian Maria and Sunflower, 2001

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Tony Rizzi, Legs and Lilies, 2003

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Tony Rizzi, William Forsythe 1, Frankfurt, 2003

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Video still

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Tony Rizzi, Hannelore Kraus, Frankfurt am Main, 2026

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Tony Rizzi, Last Portrait of My Mother, 2026, Installation view

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