

Rémi Coignet on

## Henrik Malmström

# Life Is One Live It Well

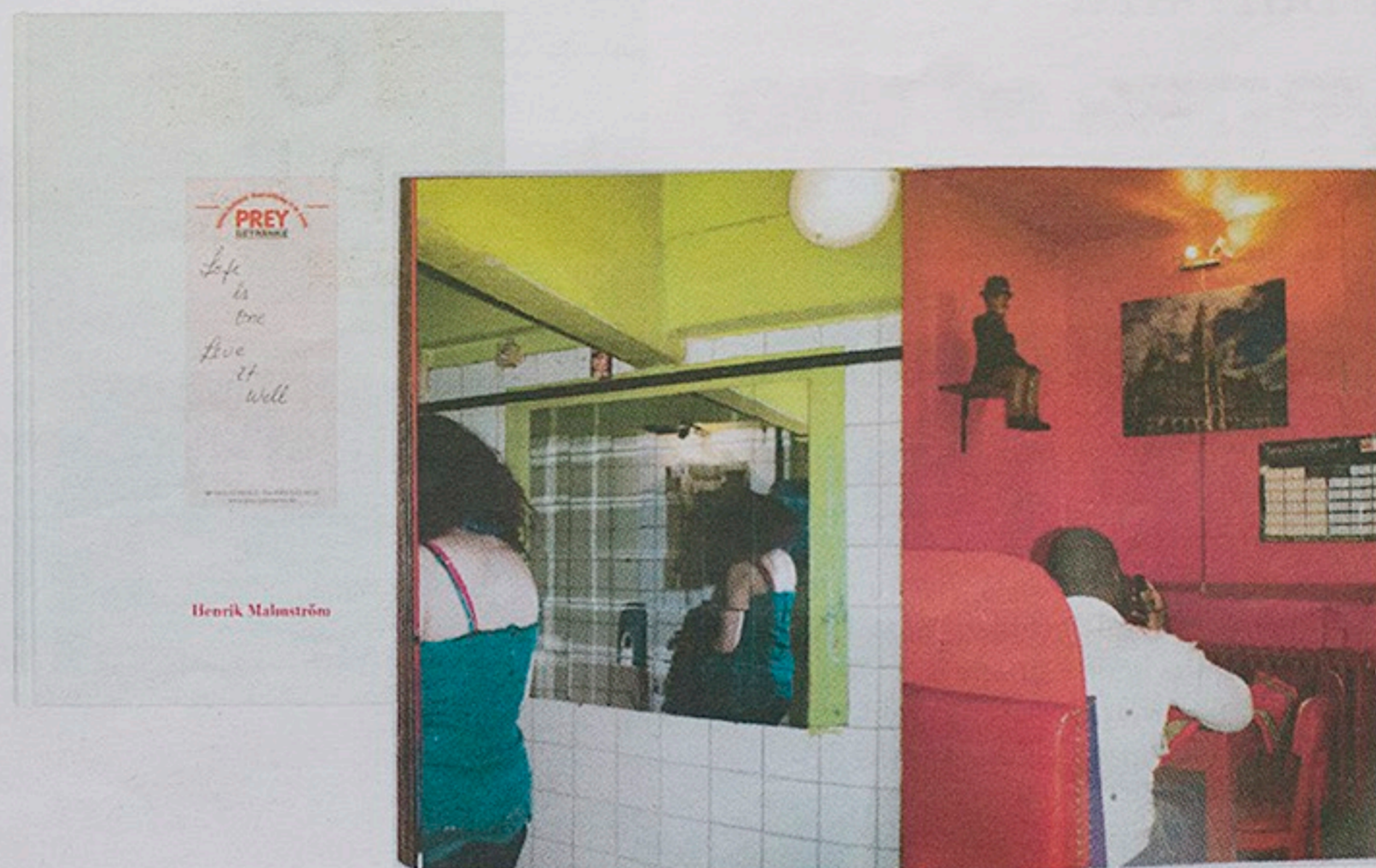
*Life Is One Live It Well* stems from long editing sessions between Finnish photographer Henrik Malmström and his publisher Michael Kominec, spent on the floor of Kominec Gallery in Berlin, and from an idea the two men hatched on a drunken night: to make a book that would follow a guy walking out of a bar's bathroom as he gazes around feverishly, clueless about what he sees, and slowly stumbles back to the middle of the room.

Designed as a long zoom out, every glossy page of *Life Is One* comprises a vertical, full-bleed image, shot with flash and paired with great subtlety. It first takes us through a series of dislocated close-ups of decrepit interiors; a bundle of electrical wiring, bare walls, and an empty champagne bottle convey the feeling that things have ceased to be. The views gradually broaden. A jukebox and urinal hint at a public space, while a pathetic garland of deflated balloons supports the initial impression, confirmed page after page: wherever this is, the party is over.

Evidence abounds. We see a peanut dispenser, which means it's a bar; photos of boats on the walls suggest it's in a harbor. There's a sign that reads "forbidden to people under eighteen" and a pair of neglected red pumps: this is no kindergarten. A black, red, and yellow flag: it must be in Germany.

Over a period of four years, Malmström set out to photograph in the bars of St. Georg, a shady district of Hamburg which is now being gentrified. Both subject and location are clearly reminiscent of Anders Petersen's photobook *Café Lehmitz*, shot in a Hamburg bar in the 1960s and '70s. But while the people in Petersen's photographs seemed happy, in spite of human misery, here the atmosphere is depressed.

The first individual appears halfway into the book: a woman, shot from behind like most of the characters



depicted in this volume. Men doze off, slouched over a table or bench; empty beer bottles pile up; a violently blonde woman looks bored, until a man joins her and they kiss. Things gradually pick up: people get up and start to dance. For a final flashback, Malmström re-photographs yellowing souvenir photos pinned on the walls of the bars—images from a time when it seemed that the party would never end. *Life Is One Live It Well* is an archaeological study of a vanishing social world, soon to be replaced by Starbucks and trendy bars.

**Rémi Coignet** is editor-in-chief for *The Eyes* magazine. In 2014, he published *Conversations*, a collection of his interviews with distinguished photographers (The Eyes Publishing).

[theeyes.eu](http://theeyes.eu)

Translated from French by Frédérique Destribats

**Henrik Malmström**

**Life Is One Live It Well**

Kominec Books • Berlin, 2015

Designed by Henrik Malmström and Michael Kominec

8 1/4 x 11 3/4 in. (21 x 30 cm) • 256 pages

250 color images • Hardcover • [kominec-gallery.com](http://kominec-gallery.com)

