

Pretty Ugly

A documentary by Jan Tenhaven

52 min

In coproduction with WDR/arte

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The regular, narrow-chested, elderly and nonathletic people suffer from an increasing pressure. What is beautiful? What is ugly? One of the oldest questions of mankind took on a new dimension. Cosmetic surgery, botox and photoshop - it has never been this easy to appear flawless. Nevertheless, in vanity fair - in fashion, advertising and pop culture – there is a place for character modelling. Every now and then there is a demand for unique faces and authentic people.

Del Keens is well known as the most ugly model of the world. In the 1990's he helped several world-famous fashion brands to create a shrill image for themselves. Now he starts his second career: In Berlin, he wants to start his own agency for models who do not meet the standard beauty ideal - "Misfit Models". But the question remains: Is society in fact ready to accept the aesthetic of imperfection? Or do the underdog models only present a contrast to the common ideals of beauty?

Even being an ugly, ridiculed working class lad from South London Del Keens ascended to incredible life as a model for Calvin Klein, Diesel and Levi's. He was discovered by accident, but his career turned out to be brief – it ended as soon as it begun. Today, he leads a life on social assistance in a Berlin outskirts and is only occasionally booked as a model. His new hopes and dreams: The establishment of his own agency for special models "Misfit Models". Del points out: "I think they're all individuals. My models are no freaks, they are individuals, like me." After years of hiding, the cosmetician Marie Glaser dares to show her burn scars in public. Boris Ekowski covers up his sensitivity with funny faces to make a living. The overweight sculptor Udo Hoffmann feels excluded from society as well. He only feels accepted by the "Misfit Models". In a way the life of this part-time model reflects the daily struggle of all of us. The struggle to be someone in a world with ideals and expectations no one can meet. The film "Pretty Ugly!" forms in a snotty and naughty way a counter-proposal to the obsession with beauty. With anarchic wit, Del Keens, the most ugly photo model in the world, leads us through the cosmos of the imperfect. The eternal question of the typical beauty will soon appear pretty boring. However a new question arises: Are Del and his models actually part of a trend towards more authenticity or are they no more than the jesters in the court of King Botox?

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