

I didn't like my first uniform. It was too gray for my complexion. But the uniforms that came after were great. The color combination of blue and white makes you look fresh in the neon light on board. To the same effect we use makeup. It's less about beauty and more about looking awake and sane after a twelve-hour day, to make our guests feel safe. Passengers give up control. Everybody likes to do that. They go up at least a thousand feet in the air only to find themselves at the mercy of the situation. That's why our facial expression is so important: If there are turbulences or strange noises, we must keep our composure. My first uniform had no stripes. Male stewards already got them, while female stewards didn't – not even me, a purser, the main steward on board. So before the uniforms were changed, the cabin crew would sometimes address the only male steward at the start of a shift, instead of me. Personally, I don't care if I wear stripes on my uniform. I know my position. Some people say they lose their identity by wearing uniforms. For me, uniforms convey a sense of belonging. It is also a form of protection. Sometimes you get verbally or physically attacked by passengers. They are upset because the twentieth glass of champagne wasn't served fast enough. As a private person I wouldn't have served such guests even one glass! Alcohol is often a problem, especially in business class. We always aim for de-escalation, but if things get too hot, we have our methods. If all else fails, we resort to tape. We're responsible for the safety on board first and foremost. The serving we only do en passant. We regularly practice for emergencies, staged in realistic ways: being locked in a washroom filled with smoke makes you completely lose your orientation at first. Equipped with a breathing apparatus, a fire extinguisher and fireproof gloves we must find the source of the fire, put it out, and leave the room before time runs out. If it was implied that we are to mainly ensure safety, the impression would be that danger lurks behind every aisle. Advertising depicts smiling faces only. The word "problem" must not be used on board. Currently our uniform's design is rather conservative and oriented toward the military origins of aviation. There are many rules about our appearance. Scarfs are mandatory as they complete our look, but also have a practical reason: stains that might occur during board service may be covered. Fingernails must be painted opaque, so that our hands always look clean. The skirt may not exceed a certain length above or below the knee. Acceptable shades for the tights include flesh tones and sheer black. Outside the plane, the crew presents a coherent image and always gangs up: the jacket must be buttoned, high heels clicking, appearance impeccable. Smoking and drinking are not allowed. After all, we represent the company when in uniform. We are walking billboards.

Theresa Büchner's work 'Faustrecht' exemplifies the pictorial strategies behind self-portraits of flight attendants in uniform circulating online. These user-generated images demonstrate a conscious approach to the diverse fantasies that are attached to the strictly regulated appearance of flight attendants. The images often serve as advertisements for sideline businesses associated with the paywalling of more explicit imagery. Mandatory work apparel, used to the advantage of the wearer, thus becomes a vehicle for gaining (economic) autonomy, undermining the logic of uniforms.