

CURATING THE COLLECTION: ANTONIA MARSH
An Intimacy of Sorts

Mary Augustine Gallery
February 19, 2013 to March 16, 2013

The works in this exhibition, *An Intimacy of Sorts*, span four decades and yet each signify an attempt to capture the often-marginalized individuals of the American social landscape. While the prerogatives of these images might initially seem to differ, each confronts sensitive issues surrounding gender and sexual identity. Not contained to the physical body, identity in *An Intimacy of Sorts* sheds light on aspects of the everyday and the self, which allows the viewer to implicate him/herself in the platform of the exhibition. Desire, hate, lust, banality and weariness, traverse these works and foreground a relationship between the self and the subjects on display.

In her *Lesbian Beds* series, Tammy Rae Carland photographs the unmade beds of female same-sex couples from above. Crumpled comforters, fading cushions, novelty sheets, and even wandering pets fill the picture frames, painting images of warm domesticity that in their honesty are able to represent their subjects precisely through their absence. While sentiments of loss and disappearance follow this emptiness, the softness of the morning light that spills into the portrait suggests that the couple is fresh out of bed. However, while we feel an intimacy with the women, through the absence of a figure, Carland addresses what she feels is a distinct lack of queer representation.

For Daniel Joseph Martinez, physical bodies constitute political instruments. These two images from his *Bodybuilders* series were taken during rehearsals for competitions in Southern California. Immediately prior to his entry on stage to compete, the artist asked each bodybuilder to pose in whatever position felt most natural. Despite this request, each bodybuilder chose a similar pose of sexualized pride, generating in each case an image of masculine power and virility embodied in unnatural self-invented positions. For Martinez, these works expand into a 21st century discourse by speaking to technological manipulation of the body now possible in form and image. In a recent interview, Martinez describes these shots as private rehearsals. While the photographs are obviously staged, the viewer is made privy to a moment of intimacy between the photographer and his sitter. As an emotion we can all relate to, this sense of the subjects' vulnerability despite their muscular machismo allows the audience to similarly experience a moment of intimacy with each bodybuilder.

Catherine Opie's image *Angela (Crotch Grab)* comes from her 1992 series *Girlfriends*. Unlike Carland and Martinez, in this body of work Opie acts as both participant and documenter. The women in the series are Opie's friends and lovers, often from marginalized subcultures. While these images are striking and provocative, Opie's personal intimacies with these women come through in the playfulness of many of these portraits. Often highly sexualized, as in this image, the honesty with which they sit for their portraits allows the work to remain devoid of voyeurism.

Whether the banal domesticity of a lesbian couple, the erotic gestures of a subculture in decline, or an androgynous gesticulation towards the camera; each of these images challenges the line of gender and social acceptability. By entering a highly personal environment, capturing a moment of vulnerability and photographing friends and lovers respectively, each artist draws the viewer into a moment of familiarity, affection or warmth with the subject. Poignantly ambiguous, it is precisely this condition of intimacy and lack of confrontation that allows an audience to relate to these individuals, a notably rare occurrence in imagery that investigates issues surrounding gender and sexual identity.

Catherine Opie, *Angela (Crotch Grab)*, 1992, Inkjet print, 10 x 10"

Daniel Joseph Martinez, *I used to eat lemon meringue pie till I overloaded my pancreas with sugar and passed out; it seemed to be a natural response to a society of abundance*, 1978, Light jet print, 29.25 x 40.25"

Tammy Rae Carland, *Untitled (Lesbian Bed #3)*, 2002, C-Print, 40 x 30"

An Intimacy of Sorts was curated by Antonia Marsh.

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