

SAM PENN: *MAX*

November 6 – December 20, 2025

New York Life Gallery is pleased to present *Max*, an exhibition of nineteen new photographs by Sam Penn. The series focuses on her collaboration with one subject, using trust to expose the entanglement between her private sexual life and her photographic practice. Self-portraits, portraits, landscapes, nudes, and close-ups of bodies are installed on four free-standing walls that section off the space and frame her largest-scale prints to date.

In conjunction with the exhibition, New York Life Gallery publishes Penn's third publication, co-authored with the eponymous subject, Max Battle. The publication features a text by Battle, interwoven with the photographs, that gives interiority and narrative to the subject through a series of thirteen vignettes. An excerpt from the piece follows.

It's 8pm in Paris, but the sun won't set for another two hours. I propose we do drugs and take pictures. We split a coke-zero dosed into small Ikea glasses. The effect is immediate. My body is bigger than hers everywhere. I pin her to the wall, wrap my inked arms around her waist, and enjoy her. I am so turned on by the look on her face when she is pressed against the bed, stretched out around me, that I swear I can feel every inch of this silicone cock. She gasps, losing control. Pleasure, power; she takes pictures. Her body is hard like glass, dazzling and breakable.

In the pharmacy, we struggle to find shampoo, shaving cream, sunscreen, and toothpaste in French travel sizes. We laugh and sigh and grab at each other as a task that should take five minutes drags us into the second half of the hour. I pick up a bottle of hand cream and curl my palm around the smooth plastic. I want to ask her, why do you love me, what would you do if I ended up pregnant, do you believe in marriage, would you break up with me if I pushed you in the canal, would you ever kill a man? We have breakfast in the park, surrounded by children laughing and picking at deconstructed hamburgers and fries. We talk about having kids. The fantasy keeps at bay a plethora of unpleasant realities, offering instead the pursuit of some long and legible future. We bike past an army of stern-faced French police officers, a hundred or so at least, machine guns held against their armored chests.

She shot 29 rolls this month, almost a thousand pictures, my body from every angle. Each image stings like her hand on my ass when I ask nicely. The greater the distance between the present and the moment of capture, the less the person in the photographs belongs to me; the harder it is to remember that I was there, moving my body into position, saying yes, saying no, saying please.

Sam Penn (b. 1998 Oklahoma City, OK) is a photographer based in New York. Penn's work was the subject of a solo exhibition at Balice Hertling Galerie, Paris, France (2024), and she has participated in group exhibitions at James Fuentes, New York, NY (2025); OCDChinatown, New York, NY (2024, 2023); and New York Life Gallery, NY (2024).