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gabrius

gianna carotenuto

malerie marder

Gianna Carotenuto: *Rather than photograph unknown people, you choose to surround yourself with intimates—your family and friends—yet the images you produce convey something other than what we have been led to believe is intimacy. There is a distinction between the familiar and the unknown in your work. How important is this division in helping you to create the types of images that you do?*

Malerie Marder: The way in which we perceive intimacy has been so heavily influenced by film and television that it's difficult to convey a different kind of intimate moment. I don't intentionally aim to keep the viewer at arm's length, but if my images convey something other than intimacy, this might be the result of my own underlying distrust of exactly what such a moment is supposed to look like, or of why people feel that photography's purpose is to reveal. My brand of intimacy is more concerned with creating a dialectic with my subjects, which is much easier to do with people with whom I am close. I have a little more insight into the architecture of their brain and there is already an established trust. I do feel challenged to move into unknown and unfamiliar territories, but perhaps this desire has nothing to do with how well I know my subjects.

GC: *It has been written about your work that it borders on soft porn; that the environments you create are lifeless and suffocating, deeply sinister and dysfunctional—the fact that you shaved off your pubic hair for one of your self-portraits or that you photographed your family in the nude. Do you find these opinions simply a reflection of the Middle American values that your work is actually challenging?*

MM: The poses in my photographs are generally not erotic; there is nothing

shocking going on, and I believe this encourages the viewer to look past the nudity. I have never thought that "shock value" had any real worth and I've never tried to purposely challenge the mores of any particular societal group, but I do like to make people feel disturbed, a little ill at ease. Yet this reaction is something that I tend to seek more from my subjects and myself. In fact, the photographs that make me feel shame are those to which I'm most drawn.

because I love and care about them both, but also because I knew it would create a naturally dynamic situation. In our culture, as long as people have their clothes on, they tend to forget they are sexual beings; maybe my photographs serve as reminders. Photographing my father resulted in a confrontation between us, but I never felt I was confronting the viewer. I was aware of being demanding by asking him to participate, but I also felt that he would have been unhappy or jealous to be excluded.



GC: *Many, though not all, of your images exude a certain Freudian undertow and explicitly bring into question the apparent hypocrisy of a particularly American understanding of sexuality. What is it about confronting the viewers' understanding or denial of underlying sexual taboos that interests you?*

MM: I took the photographs of my boyfriend Peter with my mother largely

All of my subjects may hem and haw, protest, and blush, but I know that really they enjoy the experience. My worst fear is that I'm a pervert bent on seducing the people I love into performing my own twisted scenarios.

GC: *Among your most recent works there is a photograph of a group of "thirtysomething" men and women gathered together at a bathhouse, which draws*



Above: **Malerie Marder**, *Bath House*, Culver City, California 2001, 2001, C-print, 122 x 152.4 cm.

Opposite page: **Malerie Marder**, *Communal Fire*, Hollywood, California 2001, 2001, black & white Fujiflex print, 122 x 152.4 cm.

strongly on Cézanne's *Bathers* or nineteenth-century Orientalist works depicting odalisques in harems. There would appear to be an overlap in your work between art historical traditions of the image and those that have been reinvented for film.

MM: Filmic references to art history always seem to me quite overt and self-conscious, but that's not to say they aren't effective. One of my favorite films is Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972), in which the plot is completely secondary to the visual gymnastics of the film. Watching it feels more akin to walking through a museum. Occasionally my photographs draw on other sources, but I often find that the image I have in mind triggers a whole new frame of reference in the viewer. I have certainly consciously made pictures with specific art historical references in mind. In my

self-portrait on the beach, for example, I was thinking of Ingres' hairless beauties and of how impossible that ideal is. My flawed, irritated, reddened skin (the result of intense and brutal waxing) seemed to fit perfectly with the landscape, which referenced both salon painting and cheap postcards from the California coast. Yet, although I had these references in mind, the impetus to take the picture was more personal: I wanted to be completely naked and exposed.

GC: *Nudity itself is not the most captivating aspect of your work, but rather the fact that you are present in many of the scenarios, as though you wish to continually remind the viewer of the extremely constructed nature of the image. How does your presence redefine*

or contribute to the meaning of your work?

MM: That is a complicated question, to which there are no simple answers. Appearing in my photographs is a way for me to show my hand to the viewer, because I'm not trying to create an illusion of myself as the evasive, self-effacing photographer who captures images from the world, on the outside looking in. If my work is interpreted as self-indulgent or solipsistic, I can accept it. Often I end up in my photographs out of convenience or out of necessity, because the situation is one in which I couldn't possibly ask anyone else to perform: Using myself as a subject allows me to be more experimental.

Photo Credit: Lawrence Rubin Greenberg Van Doren Fine Art, New York.

Malerie Marder was born in Philadelphia in 1971. She lives and works in Los Angeles.