

Q & A with Aneta Bartos and Nick Weber

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Artists Aneta Bartos and Nick Weber.

AMH is pleased to present **Aneta Bartos and Nick Weber in JACK & JILL** curated by Anne Huntington on display at 144 10th Avenue (nr. 19th st) in Chelsea, NYC.

Bartos and Weber fluidly breathe haunting life into two-dimensional photographs and paintings, respectively, with such essence that the works bring forth a universal force. There is a duality of existence that is simultaneously light and dark; modern and nostalgic; erotic and romantic that invites the viewer into specific, yet open-ended worlds. Powerfully reflecting on the human psyche, childhood lessons learned, and acceptance granted or denied. The images arouse dangerous emotion with a fantastical dreamlike tone. We encounter humanity at its core, portals into ecstasy, challenging the viewer to experience various states of grace, to break through life's defined states of sexuality in beautiful, disturbing and organic mediums. Bartos and Weber continue the figurative tradition, following the paths of Mapplethorpe and Bacon.

JACK & JILL references the boys and girls in us, as Bartos and Weber play the roles of artistic brother and sister. Instinctive parallels marry the works and blur the culturally formed lines ingrained in our visible and invisible worlds. The show delves into roles imbued in life's mores and taboos through gender, gender bending, innocence and existence, linking to life's complicated watered crown. **JACK & JILL** is the first time the artists are exhibiting together.

The Art Dossier sits down with Aneta Bartos and Nick Weber to discuss their collaborations in **JACK & JILL**. Be sure to also check out the exhibition at 144 10th Avenue in Chelsea before it closes February 28.

TAD: This is not the first time the two of you have met. Tell us the circumstances surrounding your initial meeting or how you two came to know of each other.

AB: The exhibition was originally conceived by book dealer and curator John McWhinnie. A fan of my work, he invited me to come to the Hamptons last summer to meet Nick Weber, whom he was showing at his gallery, Local 87. He told me that we share a similar moody, sensual, ambient quality in our artwork and we should do a show together with Anne Huntington as a curator.

When I arrived in East Hampton, I quickly realized I was in a very close community. Everyone seemed to adore Nick and within no time I knew why! He was real, genuine, kind, spontaneous, very social and not afraid nor shamed by his fears and desires, something that most men try to hide. That weekend we became the artistic brother and sister, sharing honesty about sexuality and empowering the ownership of the unacceptable thoughts and behavior.

TAD: How was this show initially conceived and what did you two think about working with each other?

NW: A little over a year ago, John McWhinnie called me and said 'you have to go see this show!' he was talking about 4 Sale, a show curated by Anne Huntington that included the work of four young, talented women. He thought that Aneta's work would speak to me and vice versa. I talked with Anne a bit and told her what John had said. Over the course of the year, she came to my studio several times. We developed a great rapport, I feel good when Anne is in my studio, she pushes me in interesting ways. Ahe decided to put us together and come up with a concept...which turned out to be Jack & Jill. Aneta and I hit it off from the start. I didn't feel uncomfortable in the least, showing her my porn paintings. And I love her masturbating boys, her 'creatures', and lascivious, writhing, women...we're both preoccupied by sex and sexuality

TAD: Had either of you seen the other's work before the initial seeds for the show had been planted?

AB: When arriving at Nick's home that weekend, I was especially smitten by his earlier work which consisted of a lot of dark portraits of his ex girlfriend as well as his night paintings. I felt right at home and I knew we shared something deeper than just aesthetics. It was the mixture of eros, an eerily quality of sexuality and anxiety.

TAD: It is so interesting how each of your work certainly seems to be informed by the other's work, who are some of your artistic influences?

AB: For a long time I never bothered to look into other artists besides what I have learned in school. In a way, I preferred not to be affected by others and shape my own style without much influence. While in school, I remember loving the romantic and soft images of Julia Margaret Cameron, early Pictorialist photographs of Edward Steichen and beautifully staged terrifying photos by Joe Peter Witkin, in recent years, I have been enjoying controversial nude photos of adolescence girls by David Hamilton and admiring the exquisite and undeniable talent and skill of Picasso, Klimt and De Kooning.

NW: My artistic influences are Balthus, Munch, Lucien Freud, Max Beckman, Frank Auerbach, Picasso, just to name a few... I love good painting, and I think that Aneta's photography is very 'painterly'.

TAD: How do you think your work fits into the current contemporary art landscape or is this something you think about?

AB: I never think nor care about how my works fits into anything.

NW: Our work fits into the current contemporary art world as a statement of physicality. We are both interested in the emotional life of the body, which often returns to sexuality. So I guess there is a back to basics feel to our work, which is a reaction to an art world, which at times seems overly referential to me. In the information age, it's hard to worry about your own life and feelings, as opposed to current gossip, so we are trying to keep it simple and vulnerable.

TAD: Both of you, though now living or working near New York City, have either lived or worked outside of the city at one point or another, do you find that your work is informed by a certain time or place? Both of your bodies of work are certainly evocative of another time and place.

AB: I'm drawn to everything that is vintage. I adore rare and old techniques, things that have been dying out in our contemporary world, especially in the medium I work with.

NW: My work is informed by the things that have stuck in my mind through the years ... certain streets in California where I lived after college ... certain flat streets in Palo Alto where cars under streetlights gave me a feeling of freedom and loneliness, secret places in plain view ... dry, warm nights. Or girls' feet. To say I have a foot fetish always takes the air out of my sails. I'd like to believe that there is meaning in the structure of the foot, and independence, sexual expression. To kneel before a woman and kiss or lick her foot is an ultimate surrender to her goddessness (that's not a real word, but you know what I mean) I also went through a period of painting the black guys who worked near my studio because they are so cool, trusted in the way they hold themselves, full of attitude without arrogance...swagger. Paint what you see and the image will flow.

TAD: The role of the female and male nude take on different connotations in this show, how do you view traditional male/female roles in art?

AB: Since what we have learned in history, it's very apparent, the male artist has owned and dominated the gaze and unlike much feminine dialog that cries out for freedom and equality, I try to take it a step further by grabbing the reigns of my expression and simply 'manhandle' the gaze. I try to challenge what is visually and expressively 'accepted' as beauty when sexuality is owned by an unabashed female perspective. There is simplicity in manner but complexity in implications. I have experienced some male resistance at the very early stage to my creation from my personal relations, subjects, and a society with patriarchal sensitivity. Even in this day of age, there are doubts and arguments whether or not the 'female gaze' exists. It's definitely rare, unexplored and often considered controversial. However, we have been seeing lots of progress over the past half century and came a long way from the stereotypical active male artist and the passive female muse-men looking at women, and women looking at themselves being gazed upon.

NW: I'm not sure what the male and female roles in art are per se, but in my women I express my hunger for them ... I feel I could just eat them up, and that is not easy to satisfy, so painting them helps. It's a combo of several things, wanting to touch and lick them, wanting to keep a distance from them, wanting to be them, worshipping them ... and keeping my relationships limited to the world of paint and canvas so I don't have to deal with them too much, they drive me crazy. When I paint men I paint less with hunger, more with empathy. I know what goes on in the heads of men and I feel for them ... us. Lonely with tender, macho, scared, liking the attention and intimacy, yet guarded and uncomfortable (especially when painted by another 'heterosexual' man). I think Aneta captures men beautifully in her 'boys' series, she is hunting them but so gentle and appreciative of them. I think she has a fondness for the penis that is refreshing these days. She has taken over control, but not to castrate.

TAD: Would you describe the work as exploitative? Some could certainly describe this work as shocking but it can also be perceived and very honest and vulnerable, how do you reconcile the differences?

AB: I don't think neither of our work is exploitative. Even in Nick's world of porn paintings, the woman is in charge. She is the dominant sexual creature and the aim seems to glorify and worship her sex. Personally my aim is to open myself up to honesty in exploring my reflections of the perplexities of women in gender politics both social and interpersonal. In our show Jack & Jill, Nick and I explore deeper meaning of existence by examining the strong connection between sexuality and spirit, getting there through physical approach, both in medium and subject matter. We use our sexuality as the spark, which turns the matter into spirit. Through our work, we are exposing ourselves and in the process exposing society's repression.

NW: No exploitation here, I don't think. That needs an economic component, and there's none here. I am fascinated by gang bangs, because it's a girl or woman who is getting absolutely horrified. She's so vulnerable, and is in a way ... killed, destroyed, turned inside out. It must be incredibly horrible and amazing at the same time, a self obliteration leading to liberation. Serving yourself up on a plate, antelope to lions. Of course, in the porn industry, women are exploited, there's no doubt about it. But painters paint what they see, and just as we saw a lot of pastoral landscapes 127 years ago, we see a lot of porn today. These paintings are about the internet and the desire to destroy ourselves and others. I always look at Goya's "Cinco de Mayo" — a man stands before a firing squad with arms outstretched, a glowing white figure who lives in eternity in the moment just before a barrage of bullets add him to the pile of dead guys lying at his feet. My gang banged, double penetrated girls remind me of him, stars of the show, saints.

ANETA BARTOS & NICK WEBER in JACK & JILL

Curated by ANNE HUNTINGTON

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