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Aneta Bartos, photo by Matthew Leifheit for CCNY

Boys

Photographs by Aneta Bartos, curated by Jon Feinstein

At the Carlton Arms Hotel, 160 E 25th Street NYC, rooms 1A and 4A

31 January — 21 February 2013

The Carlton Arms Hotel is entered by pressing a buzzer and then walking up a flight of stairs littered with hand-lettered warning signs not to let the cats escape. The current installation of Aneta Bartos' series "Boys" curated by Jon Feinstein can be viewed by requesting the keys to rooms 1A and 4A at the front desk, where a checklist of images and curatorial statement are also available. After adjusting to the dim light in the room, some normal fixtures of a hotel become apparent—a charmingly shabby desk, a bed. On the warm gray walls hang murky photographs of young men masturbating in thick cream-colored mattes.



Feinstein and Bartos met as a result of the 2012 exhibition "31 Women in Art Photography" (read my article on this show for Time Magazine's [Lightbox](#)), a large group show which Jon Feinstein curated with Natalia Sacasa for the nonprofit organization he cofounded, [Humble Arts Foundation](#). "The work we included in that exhibition was not part of "Boys" but was equally compelling," said Feinstein to MATTE, "Aneta approached me shortly after that to work with her on this show. I found her work to be challenging, provocative and beautiful, and much different than other photographers I've worked with over the past few years."



Bartos balances the provocative subject matter of these photographs with a pictorialist treatment. She favors Polaroid media to produce this painterly sfumato, resulting in mottled texture and a warm palette. As Bartos puts it, "I love its quality of a distilled mood." This approach sweeps the pictures firmly out of the realm of pornography and places them in conversation with painting. The images add to the historical dialogue photography has had with painting. They also comment on the ways in which photography is commonly used in the porn industry. These are erotic images of men made by a woman. "I wanted to challenge what is visually and expressively excepted as beauty in male condition when sexuality is owned by a female perspective," says Bartos. Feinstein also sees the work as a challenge to current societal norms. "I think now is especially important as we've become so accustomed to seeing overly sexualized images of women in the media, in fashion, art etc, but somehow there's a turn of the head to images of male nudity."



All of the photographs in the exhibition were shot in rooms at The Carlton Arms. "I first discovered the hotel in 2006," says Bartos, "I loved it's crazy-eclectic surreally seedy and gloomy vibe." Exhibiting these photographs in the same space they were made in completely alters the footing of the viewer. Instead of the separation the audience is usually afforded by a traditional gallery space from the actual scene being depicted in a photograph, this installation plants the viewer at the scene of the crime. "I think the dim, old New York atmosphere of the hotel gives a completely different, and much more intimate read than seeing them in a Chelsea white-space gallery," adds Feinstein.

When asked if the experience of making these pictures is sexual to her, Bartos answers, "Of course it is." Her subjects are not freelance exhibitionists culled from the internet. Instead Bartos chooses to photograph close friends and people she has known for a long time. By setting the exhibition at The Carlton Arms the viewer is invited into these relationships. Intimacy between subject and photographer is shared with the audience, disturbing the sense of voyeurism typically inherent in viewing pornographic images.

These pictures today represent a very subversive take on beauty. By looking at them we indulge in Bartos' curiosity, and we gladly become her partner in crime. —MATTE Magazine for CCNY

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