

[NSFW] Darkly Erotic Photos Capture Men Masturbating in Hotel Rooms

SE SAMI EMORY
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Photo by Aneta Bartos from her Boy series, courtesy of the artist and The Museum of Sex

Aneta Bartos's tender and explicit portraits of male nudes appear in 'NSFW: Female Gaze' at the Museum of Sex.

What is rarer than a female photographer capturing scenes of male masturbation for the public eye, is one who sees the act as just another step in documenting the unfiltered truths of the human condition. But to [Aneta Bartos](#), taboos are like the flimsy red ribbons of finish lines: [built to be broken](#).

In her work as a photographer, Bartos has cast [her perspective as a female artist](#) on the male and female nude, masturbation, and more recently, her own relationship with her body-builder father in a series of semi-nude self-portraits. It is Bartos' tender and shameless portraiture, of both herself and others, that makes her an integral part of any discussion on [how contemporary female artists](#) are continuing to shape perceptions of sexuality.

When Bartos moved from Poland to New York at the age of 16, she didn't know a word of English. In her new public high school in Brooklyn, she tells *Creators* that "photography was the one class I took where I felt I could communicate." It took several more years, however, until partway through college, she decided to try her hand at the art that came so naturally to her.



Photo by Aneta Bartos from her Spider Monkeys series, courtesy of the artist

Nudity and semi-nudity thread Bartos's works. She says finds both states "more true." Much is self-evident in her early work, such as her soulful series, *Morning Dusk*, or her more explicit series, *A Sale*, wherein young women twist together in erotic ecstasy. But instead of posing for the camera, they appear entirely wrapped up in their own world. "I wanted to create a self-sufficient, sexually and dangerously charged world of females, completely independent of men and her gaze," explains Bartos, "not an eroticized subject matter to provide sexual arousal for the viewer."

In 2011, however, Bartos moved on to a new subject. At the time, she noticed that "there were only a handful of successful female artists working with nude men." So, instead of continuing to focus on the lithe, female bodies of her and her friends, Bartos decided to turn her lens on the male form.

"It seemed it was a mostly unexplored phenomenon," she explains, "especially when it comes to presenting men's sexuality from a female point of view." In the series *Boys*, selections from which are featured in *NSFW: Female Gaze*, the exhibition co-curated by *Creators* at The Museum of Sex, the photographer shows men in prone poses, sprawled across grungy motel rooms; some seem recently spent, some are in the midst of pleasuring themselves as if unobserved.



Photo by Aneta Bartos from her Boy series, courtesy of the artist and The Museum of Sex

The response to the project was a mixed bag of admiration and outrage. "Clearly, there has been big progress since then," she says. "However, I feel resistance even now. The press seems to be afraid to show an artist's vision," for instance, "of the very human act of a man masturbating."

From shooting *Boys*, Bartos says she realized that photographing men, especially sexualized, naked men, was "a challenge as well as a rush of power." She did not linger, however. "It was something I wanted to do and I did it," she says. "Once the challenge was done and I said what I wanted to say, I moved on to different projects."



Photo by Aneta Bartos from her Boy series, courtesy of the artist and The Museum of Sex

Bartos found her next challenge closer to home. Once a year, for a week or so, the photographer visits Poland, where her father still lives. On one such trip, Bartos's father asked her to take photos of his body, to commemorate a lifetime of physical fitness. The artist's resultant series, *Dad*, shows the struggle of a man, a lifelong body builder, who is anticipating the tolls age must eventually take on his sculpted form.

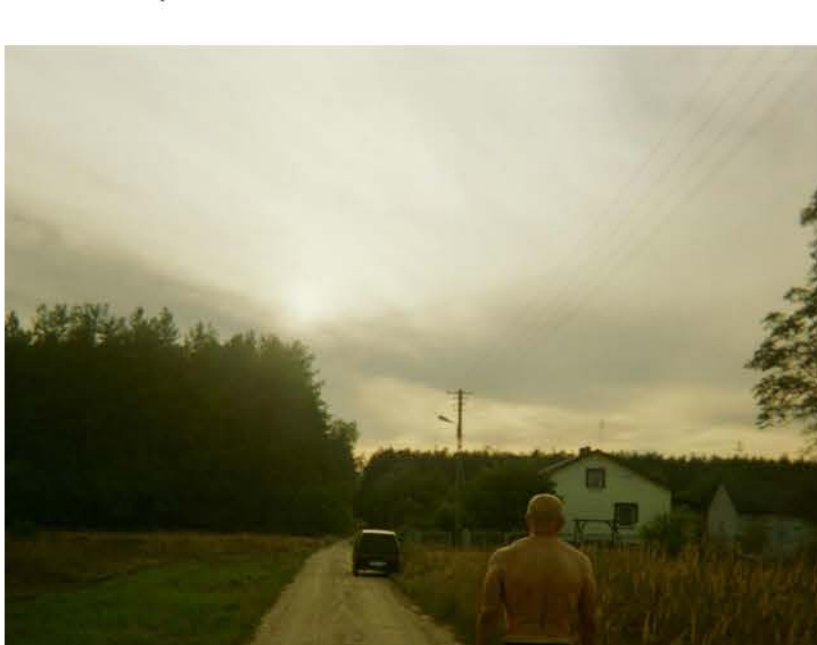


Photo by Aneta Bartos from her Dad series, courtesy of the artist

Her subsequent series, *Family Portrait*, continues this chapter of her work by illustrating her own relationship to her father through vintaged self-portraits. "The father-daughter relationship," Bartos explains, "partially because of the interplay of masculinity and femininity, is incredibly complex and is fertile ground for exploring the huge range of what it means to be human."

In these images, Bartos and her father, clad in lingerie and a speedo, respectively, pose in the idyllic Polish countryside. As her father flexes, Bartos swings on trees, lifts her skirt, lies childishly on the couch. Though short of hero worship, the images are bluntly reverent. They show a daughter who, since childhood, has been proud of the powerful image her father makes.

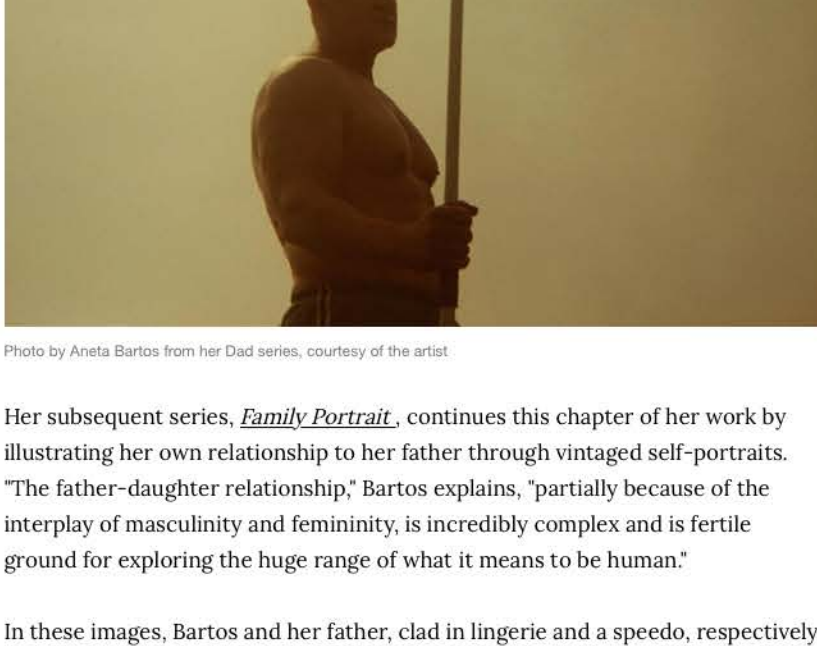


Photo by Aneta Bartos from her Family Portrait series, courtesy of the artist

They also, however, show a woman who is willing to explore her own vulnerabilities through the same critical gaze with which she examines masculinity, relationships, and sexuality. This is, in short, what the female gaze means to Aneta Bartos. It does not signify a further limiting label for female art, but rather heralds a "shifting tide of power positions in the arts and society."



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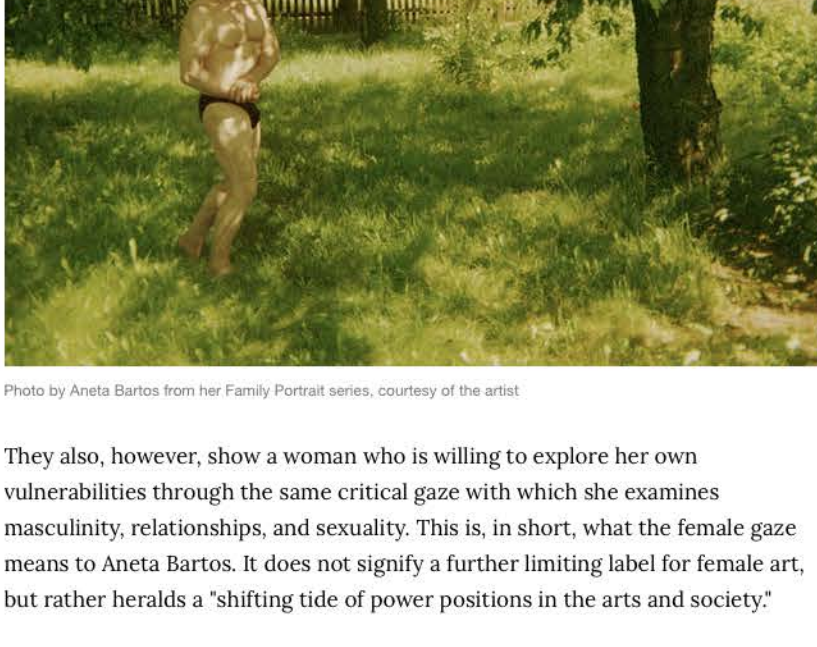


Photo by Aneta Bartos from her Family Portrait series, courtesy of the artist

Visit [Aneta Bartos's website](#) for more of her work. Find out more about our show at The Museum of Sex, *NSFW: Female Gaze* [here](#).