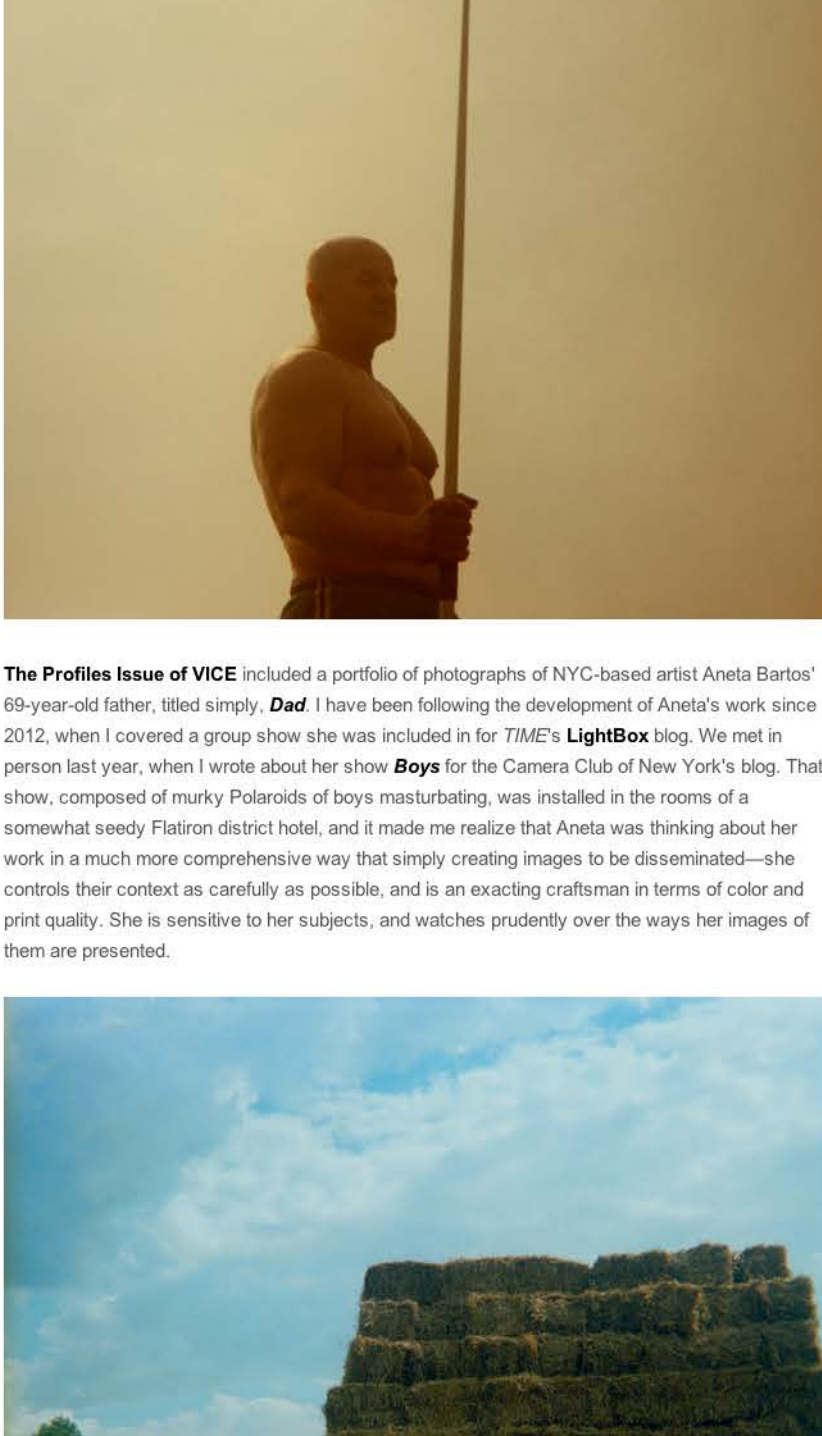
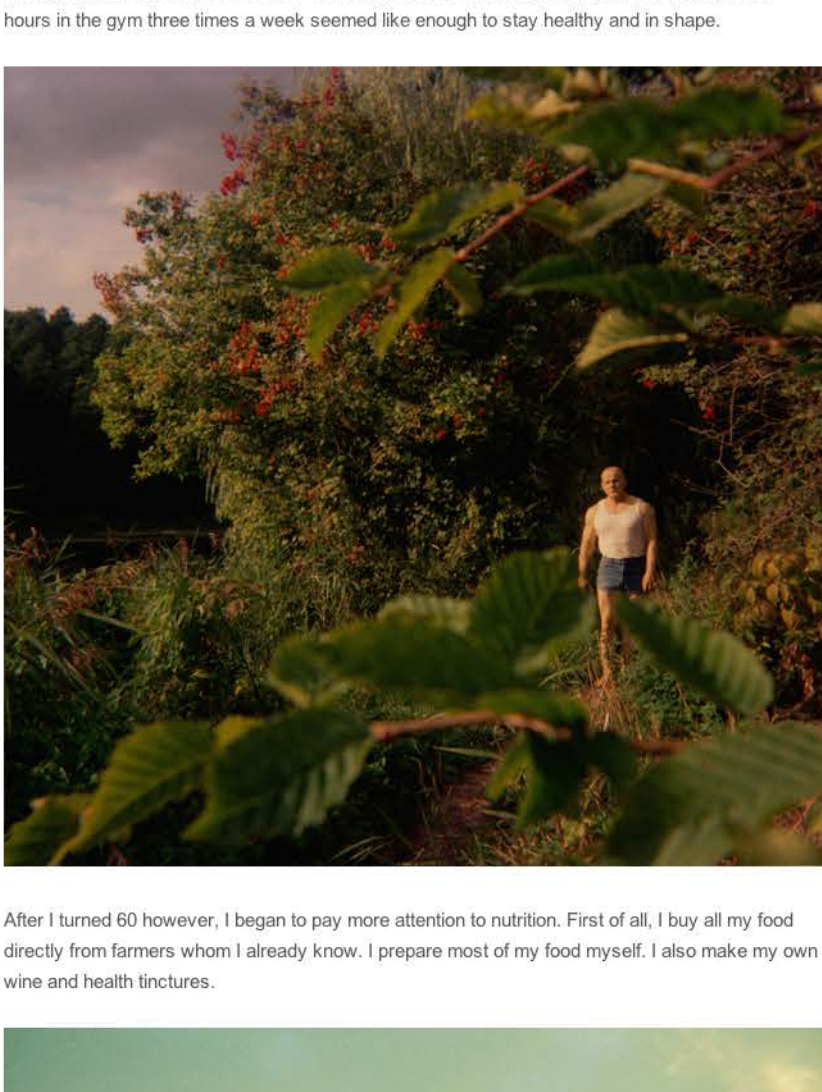


# MY DAD THE BODYBUILDER

By Matthew Leifheit | Aug 5 2014



The Profiles Issue of **VICE** included a portfolio of photographs of NYC-based artist Aneta Bartos' 69-year-old father, titled simply, **Dad**. I have been following the development of Aneta's work since 2012, when I covered a group show she was including in for **TIME's LightBox** blog. We met in person last year, when I wrote about her show **Boys** for the Camera Club of New York's blog. That show, composed of murky Polaroids of boys masturbating, was installed in the rooms of a somewhat seedy Flatiron district hotel, and it made me realize that Aneta was thinking about her work in a much more comprehensive way that simply creating images to be disseminated—she controls their context as carefully as possible, and is an exacting craftsman in terms of color and print quality. She is sensitive to her subjects, and watches prudently over the ways her images of them are presented.



Early this spring, Aneta showed me photographs of her bodybuilder father she had begun making on a trip home to Poland. Using a Kodak Instamatic camera and long-expired film, her father is rendered in his native landscape, a powerful and imposing figure set against pastoral scenes and glowing sunsets. The aesthetic of the resulting images oscillates between family album and soviet propaganda poster, but the quality of the pictures is always dreamy. "His presence takes me back to my youth, to what felt like an endless stretch of days in a worry-free world anchored by my powerful and loving father," Aneta told me. "I reflect on how his commitment to education, fitness, organic food, and the simplicity of basic living has kept him so young and full of vitality." Since we published these pictures, Aneta has returned to Poland and continued to photograph. When I saw the latest pictures, I couldn't help but think the Dad series might become her best work yet. But I wanted to know more about the relationship between photographer and subject, because it's not as if she is photographing just any model. It changes the dynamic to photograph someone who is this close to you. I talked to both Aneta and her father Zbigniew to find out more.

**VICE: Zbigniew, what is your health regimen like?**

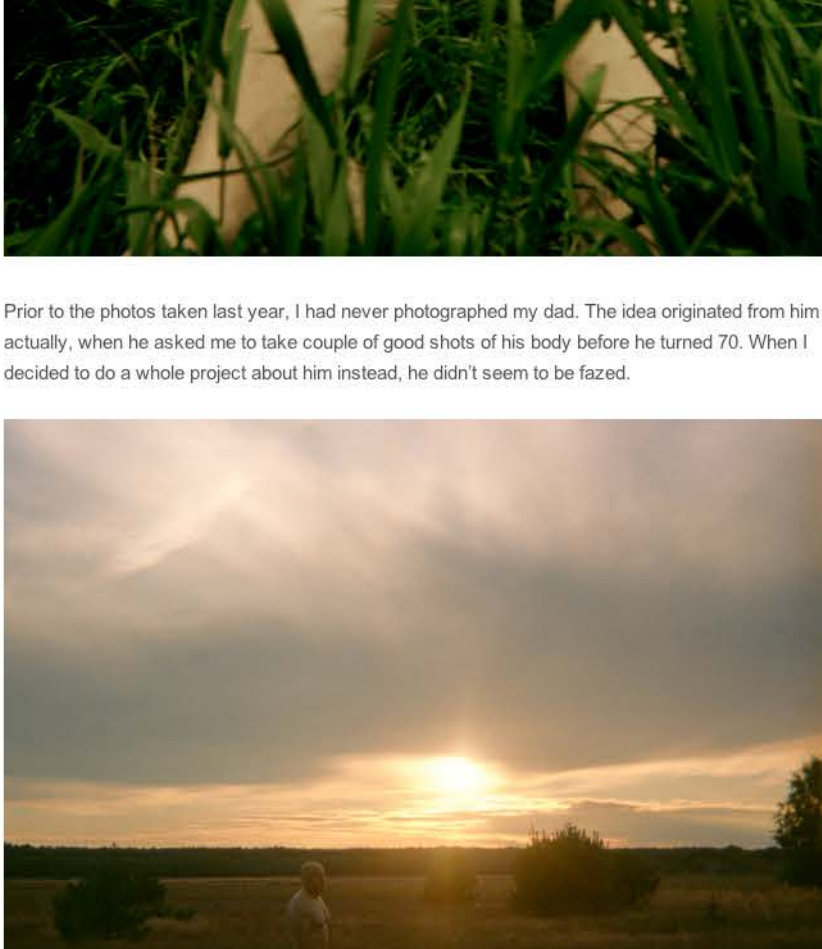
**Zbigniew Bartos:** Before I turned 60, I ate everything, without any special diets or restrictions. During that time most of the food in Poland was natural and healthy, therefore spending a few hours in the gym three times a week seemed like enough to stay healthy and in shape.



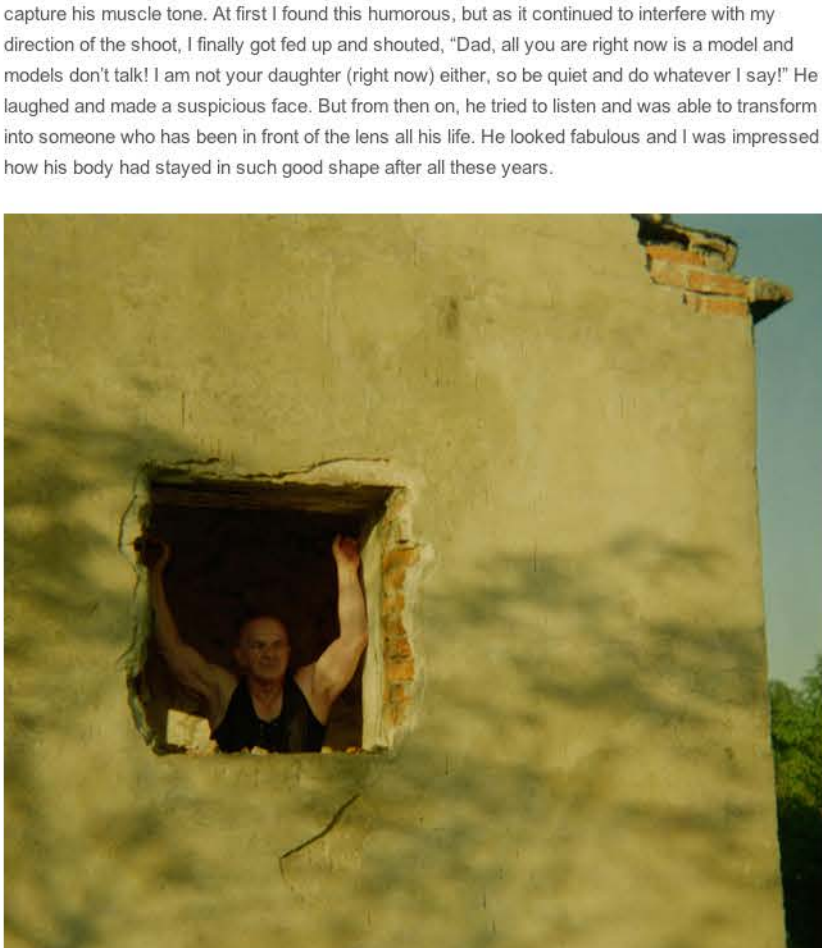
After I turned 60 however, I began to pay more attention to nutrition. First of all, I buy all my food directly from farmers whom I already know. I prepare most of my food myself. I also make my own wine and health tinctures.



I eat small amounts a few times a day making sure that the meals contain a good balance of acid and alkaline. I always consume a lot of proteins derived both from meats and vegetables. I eat garlic, onions, tomatoes and radishes daily and my favorite fruit is apples and wild blueberries picked from the forest.



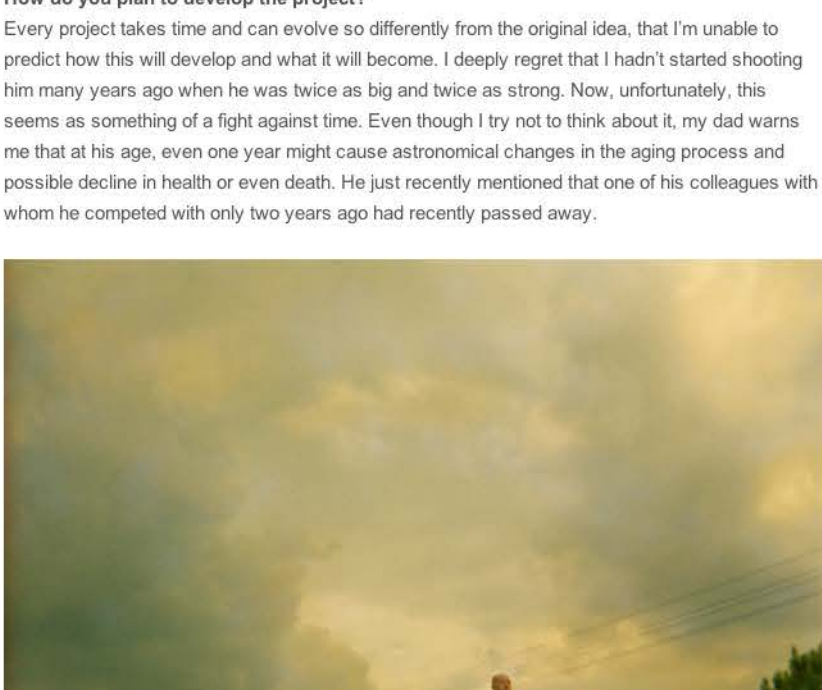
When it comes to my adventure with bodybuilding, I believe I have been competing longer than any other bodybuilder in the world. I won my first competition on February 28, 1964.



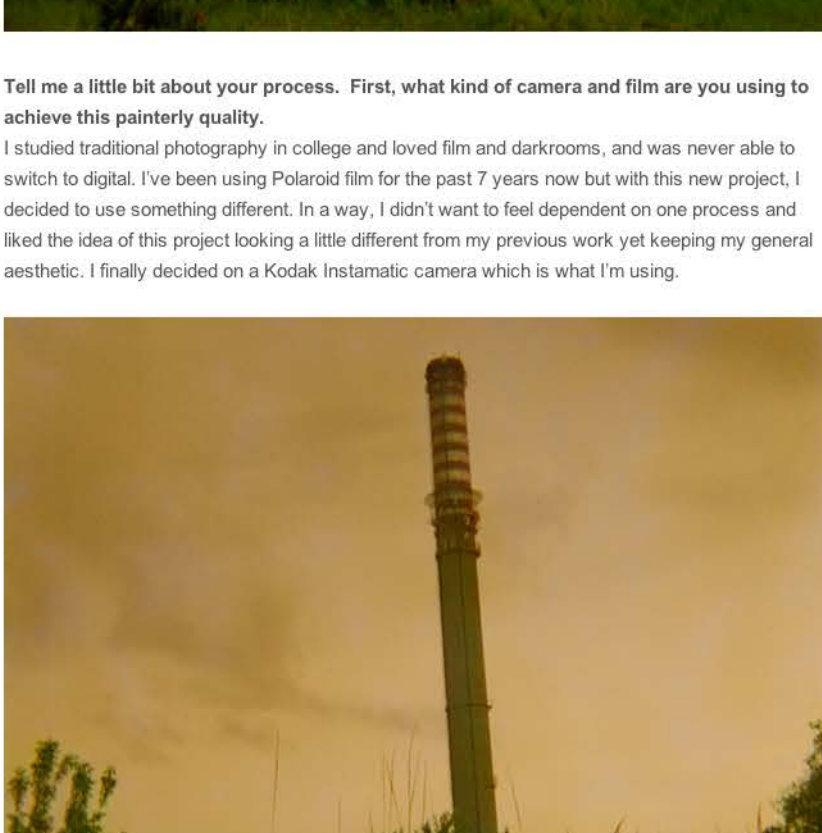
My 50 year experience of bodybuilding, which, by the way, was always a hobby and not my profession, gave me a lot of pleasure and stamina, not to mention the simple fact that it shaped my body close to the ideals of masculinity from Classical Greece.

**Aneta, how do the shoots develop? What is it like photographing your father? I took some pictures of my parents, and it made me notice how old they were.**

**Aneta Bartos:** I actually just got back to New York City from Poland, where I continued this project, which I began last summer. I was only able to shoot my dad very briefly then and it was still in an experimental phase. The possibilities seem broader this time around. I shot at his gym, which is located in the back of a church, at his house, possibly his basement (which contains his monk potions dated as far as back my birthday), and the city streets. If he qualifies, I would love to shoot him during the world championship in Mexico City this fall.



Prior to the photos taken last year, I had never photographed my dad. The idea originated from him actually, when he asked me to take couple of good shots of his body before he turned 70. When I decided to do a whole project about him instead, he didn't seem to be fazed.



On the first day of the photo shoot, my dad began to lecture me about the light and when it's best to capture his muscle tone. At first I found this humorous, but as it continued to interfere with my direction of the shoot, I finally got fed up and shouted, "Dad, all you are right now is a model and models don't talk! I am not your daughter (right now) either, so be quiet and do whatever I say!" He laughed and made a suspicious face. But from then on, he tried to listen and was able to transform into someone who has been in front of the lens all his life. He looked fabulous and I was impressed how his body had stayed in such good shape after all these years.



Ever since I was a little girl, he was involved in bodybuilding, training teams and performing in front of audiences. I always remember him hanging out in speedos around the house and wearing super tight jeans and little tank tops when running errands. Going anywhere with my dad created a bit of a spectacle. Once I turned into a teenage girl, this stopped working to my advantage. He terrorized boys around me. It's a good thing I left Poland at 16! (laughs)



**How do you plan to develop the project?**

Every project takes time and can evolve so differently from the original idea, that I'm unable to predict how this will develop and what it will become. I deeply regret that I hadn't started shooting him many years ago when he was twice as big and twice as strong. Now, unfortunately, this seems as something of a fight against time. Even though I try not to think about it, my dad warns me that at his age, even one year might cause astronomical changes in the aging process and possible decline in health or even death. He just recently mentioned that one of his colleagues with whom he competed with only two years ago had recently passed away.



**Tell me a little bit about your process. First, what kind of camera and film are you using to achieve this painterly quality.**

I studied traditional photography in college and loved film and darkrooms, and was never able to switch to digital. I've been using Polaroid film for the past 7 years now but with this new project, I decided to use something different. In a way, I didn't want to feel dependent on one process and liked the idea of this project looking a little different from my previous work yet keeping my general aesthetic. I finally decided on a Kodak Instamatic camera which is what I'm using.



**How do you feel about being photographed, Zbigniew?**

I feel good in front of the camera. I'm not nervous or shy. I have appeared in a lot of Polish press over the years. I considered being an actor while in high school. I was accepted into most prestigious theatre in Krakow, called Old Theatre during which its director Zygmunt Hubner chose me to act in a modern adaptation of a very prominent drama by Tadeusz Rózewicz called 'Left Home'. I declined because I worried about finals and never pursued acting further.



See more pictures by **Aneta Bartos** on her website. A monograph of her series **Spider Monkeys** will be published this fall.

**Matthew Leifheit** is photo editor of **VICE**. Follow him on **Twitter**.