

2 Mar 2019

OBSERVATIONS

What Happens When Men Get Naked For Art?

The male nude might be one of the most common subjects in ancient and classical art, but in contemporary times it is unfashionable. Charlotte Jansen speaks to four artists about their work with nude men.



Aneta Bartos, *From Dad*, 2013

“I feel there can be more tension surrounding issues of sexuality when shooting male nudes as opposed to female nudes”

Aneta Bartos, the Polish-born, New York-based artist elates to this issue as a female photographer: “I feel there can be more tension surrounding issues of sexuality and subverting ideas about objectification, dominance, or just general comfort when shooting male nudes as opposed to female nudes. Even if there isn’t any sexual tension present, there is always the possibility of a thought or situation arising. I find men can be much more delusional than women.”

Bartos has photographed young men masturbating in hotel rooms, (*Boys*, 2012) and completed an acclaimed portrait series on her Father who is a bodybuilder, (*Dad*, 2013). These two series navigate two diametrically opposed relationships with men and male bodies, shedding light on archetypes of paternity and reversing the objectified, sexual nude as a female photographer.

“At the age of sixty-eight and having spent a lifetime as a competitive bodybuilder, my Dad asked me to take a few shots documenting his physique before it degenerated.” Bartos told me. “The original group of photographs I took inspired me to transform the idea into a long-term project. Dad is the embodiment of stability and strength and my childhood a representation of a worry-free world produced by my powerful yet gentle and loving father. His body plays a big role but it has more to with the fact that I was raised with a very unorthodox way of thinking of the body (as the daughter of a bodybuilder) in stark contrast to the more puritanical Catholic ways of thinking about the body in Poland at the time.”



Aneta Bartos, *David*, 2012, from *Boys*

Her *Boys* project, meanwhile, emerged from earlier work with female nudity and on female sexuality, “and perplexing aspects of women in gender politics, which made me more conscious of a decidedly patriarchic ideology in the arts and greater society,” she explains. “I had the urge to turn it upside down. I decided to push things further and challenge one of the most well-established male power phenomenon: the male gaze. The female was behind the camera and commanding the male to perform in the most sexual and vulnerable way—to masturbate.”