

ISSUE 03: EXHIBITIONISM

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Aneta Bartos / Zeus: Dad Series / 2013

EXAMINATION #1

FATHER FIGURE

Aneta Bartos reveals her dad, the strongman

A close-up of bulging thigh muscles intersected by a high-cut black Speedo is not the first image that comes to mind when picturing an aging man, much less a 70-year-old father from small-town Poland. Therein lies the powerfully unexpected visual juxtaposition in *Dad*, a portrait series by NYC-based artist Aneta Bartos, featuring photographs of her body-builder father, Zbigniew Bartos.

Shot with a Kodak Instamatic camera and long-expired film, Mr. Bartos's chiseled figure stands out against the sun-blurred haze of Polish farm country, like a Greek statue dropped in the middle of a pastoral dream world. The idea for the series originated when Mr. Bartos asked Aneta to photograph his body while he was still in relatively good shape. Aneta eagerly agreed and later decided to develop a whole project around him, embracing the opportunity to document her father's impressive physique.

The final collection of photographs in *Dad* represents a mesmerizing study in contrasts. Mr. Bartos's tangible, fatherly vulnerability weighs softly against the sharp outlines of his imposing biceps. Attention is drawn to a flash of sunlight across a rippling abdomen or the framing of a distant, imposing silhouette within a border of lush greenery. Similarly, the series' nostalgically wholesome "family album" aesthetic offsets the titillation of his physical exhibition.

Aneta's intimate rapport with her father allowed her to photograph him in various states of undress without any self-consciousness on either end. She remarks, "Even though I grew up in a Catholic society, which made you constantly feel shameful about your body, my parents seemed to be disconnected from this rigorous mentality." In *Dad*, Mr. Bartos's extraordinary musculature is depicted as a source of pride, worthy of admiration. He poses and flexes with graceful confidence, embodying the ideal of a gentle giant.

Both of Aneta's parents remained open and unashamed about their bodies throughout her youth. Aneta reminisces fondly, "In our house my dad was always lounging around in his tiny speedos while my mom laid out topless in the garden... It was natural and fun with a great sense of adventure and playfulness, and it never felt like anything sexual or inappropriate." This positive perspective on the body as natural—never shameful—is evident in Aneta's photography.

But as much as *Dad* is an homage to Mr. Bartos's physique, it is also a poignant celebration of Aneta's close bond with her father. Aneta recalls how a childhood friend jokingly asked if she could imagine any other dad running around the forest in a G-string for his daughter. Aneta admits affectionately, "I honestly couldn't."

-Harling Ross



Aneta Bartos / Legs: Dad Series / 2013



Aneta Bartos / Warrior: Dad Series / 2013



Aneta Bartos / Bronson: Dad Series / 2013



Aneta Bartos / Homo Sapien: Dad Series / 2013