



Photography / Interviste / Aneta Bartos



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Aneta Bartos' *Family Portraits* exude that kind of raw, archetypal strength that enables the artist to explore something as intimate and personal as her relationship with her father while addressing, at the same time, an array of many different universal themes that resonate with each and every viewer: the inescapable passing of time and how it affects our physical appearance; sexuality and its subconscious subtext within every human relationship; all the complex, thorny issues concerning portraiture, self-portraiture and memory in the photographic medium – in one way or another we can all read or project something meaningful on to her images.

[Bartos](#) is a Polish art photographer currently based in NYC and *Family Portrait*, her latest work, will be on display at [Postmasters Gallery](#) until October 14, 2017. As a work it is somewhat uncomfortable and unsettling to look at even before learning that the young, sensual woman depicted alongside a speedo-clad, muscular older man portrayed in dreamlike, timeless settings are in fact father and daughter. The photos are undoubtedly permeated by a subtle sense of eroticism and, despite the nostalgic and romantic filter, it is a type of eroticism that works on different levels, some intertwining, some running parallel.

After tackling issues related to the male gaze and the representation of female sexuality, Bartos moved to a project on her father, simply titled *Dad*, in which she shot her bodybuilder parent in her native Poland using a Kodak Instamatic camera and expired film: the images have a painterly, out-of-time quality and set the aesthetic tone for her following project, an organic evolution and at the same time something radically different: *Family Portrait*. By the simple act of placing herself in the frame, the shift is tremendous, taking the scope and the enigmatic quality of all of her works to a new order of magnitude.

We contacted Bartos to ask her questions about her works and approach. Here's our Q&A.

When did you first get interested in photography?

I took a photography class in high school when I didn't speak any English (after I moved from Poland). It was the only class that gave me a sensation of communication. It felt natural to me and I embraced it. However it wasn't until my second year of college that I decided this was what I wanted to do as a serious pursuit.

You started, briefly, as a fashion photographer: how did the shift from fashion to art photography happened?

Fashion was a good adventure I had after college, but I realized that I wanted to work in more intimate environments, creating artwork without any boundaries or restrictions.

To what degree your upbringing influence the way you take pictures?

My parents' free attitudes toward the body, which contradicted many of the very Catholic ways of thinking in Poland, had a big influence on my work.

Your photos from the series "Family Portrait" are deeply charged with many archetypes, at least from the viewer's perspective. What do you see in the project?

The *Dad* series began with me taking photographs of my speedo-wearing father against pastoral scenes around the city I grew up in. At the age sixty-eight, my father asked me to take a few shots documenting his body before he turned seventy. He has been involved in a competitive bodybuilding for over half a century, and wanted to be immortalized in a beautiful and artistic way before his body degenerated and inevitably ran its course. This gave me an idea to turn this into the long-term project called *Dad*. While shooting my father for the third summer in a row, I wanted to dive deeper into the father-daughter relationship, surpassing the perspective of a younger child who was idealizing her powerful and loving father. Introducing myself into the series seemed like a natural and organic progression. In *Family Portrait* where I accompany him in every shot, he no longer plays the center stage of a hero-like, gentle-giant creature. Instead of idealizing him, I am channeling different levels of our relationship pushing and pulling through time, peeling layers of our relationship by digging into a dreamscape of memories, re-enacting fleeting moments, and alluding to the joy, uninhibitedness, rebellion, and complexity inherent as a daughter grows up and comes of age.

What is your relationship with sexuality and the nude in your photos?

They can be unrelated, depending on a project. Nude bodies can carry meanings and messages that are often not about sex itself. It is interesting to me that people usually associate nudity with sex and perversion and don't see everything else that might be lurking beneath. It shows the close-mindedness of our perceptions and how simplistic our thoughts can be about something as natural and complex as the body and interaction of bodies.

Do or did you ever feel uncomfortable taking a picture? Where are your boundaries?

If I don't feel a little uncomfortable taking a picture then I am not shooting the right thing. I don't have any boundaries.

How do you develop the concepts behind a long-term project?

I start with a concept and let it develop over time. That is the beauty of a long-term project. It just unwinds organically and can twist in directions that you didn't plan or expect.

Your photos have such a painterly quality: what is your relationship with the analog photographic process?

I have always worked with film and Polaroid. They possess certain qualities that you can't obtain with digital cameras. There has always been something magical to me about the chemical process. It's the atmosphere, color, anticipation and surprises. I am never completely sure what I am going to get. I discovered 126-film while searching for semi-retro aesthetics that I wanted to use for my *Dad* project in 2013. Since then it has been very difficult to find the discontinued 126 cartridges so I started using both 126 and Polaroid together.

What are you currently working on?

I will be working on twenty new *Family Portrait* images that I just shot this summer and eventually would like to do a book.

ANETA BARTOS *Family Portrait*

Postmasters Gallery

September 8 – October 14, 2017

54 Franklin Street in Tribeca

| Tuesday through Saturday 11 – 6 PM

with Thursday hours extended to 8 PM |