

MASSIMODECARLO

HOW THEY MET THEMSELVES: FOLIE À DEUX

CURATED BY PIOTR UKLAŃSKI

WITH ARTWORKS BY FRANCIS BACON, HANS BELLMER, PAUL CADMUS, LEONOR FINI, JARED FRENCH, NAN GOLDIN, JENNA GRIBBON, FRIDA KAHLO, RICHARD KERN, TAMARA DE LEMPICKA, LEE MILLER, ELIZABETH PEYTON, MAN RAY, DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI, HENRY TAYLOR, PIOTR UKLAŃSKI, FELIX VALLOTTON, CHARLES WHITE, ANDREW WYETH.

As a compliment to his exhibition *How They Met Themselves* at Massimo De Carlo gallery in Milan, Piotr Ukiński has conceived of a virtual exhibition that brings together a compelling, historical range of portraits by artists and their muses. Named after the mysterious double portrait by Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Lizzie Siddal, this exhibition interrogates mythologies of creative couples, symbiotic muses and other co-dependencies that have been immortalized in art over the past 200 years.

Known as a form of madness shared by two people, the term 'folie à deux' might be applied to a number of intense artistic relationships. The obsessive exchange between two artists, between artists and their muses and other obsessive couplings percolate throughout art history.

Feminist art history has many achievements under its belt: throwing spotlight on the work of numerous artists forgotten in the margins and footnotes, or repressed all together. Of those revisionist interventions, its perhaps in the realm of creative couples where feminist scholarship has been the most poignant and effective. At least when it comes to examining heteronormative examples, feminist inquiry has upended the traditional narrative of shared romantic and artistic partnerships where the female artist/wife/mistress is doomed to live in the shadows of her male companion, her work implicitly inferior to her husband/boyfriend's genius. Some of the most famous can be called out just by their first names: Diego and Frieda, Jackson and Lee, Alfred and Georgia, Robert and Sonia, to name a few. When scrutinized through the lens of feminist history, these mythologized artistic dyads have been deconstructed, reimagined, revised.

Whether in the bedroom or in the studio, pushing aside the armature of patriarchy forces us to look afresh at the biographical facts as well as the entwined artistic and cultural contributions of each individual as well as a couple. In some cases, this reset is so radical that it almost completely obliterates the creative and intimate binary. What do we make of these extreme twosomes whose co-dependencies allowed them to thrive? These pairs sometimes cross over into clinical abuse, psychological oppression, or spiritual abjection. But they also ring the two-pronged chime of productivity and destruction. Mythos and Pathos, Eros and Thanatos! Those infamously uncomfortable *Folie à Deux* in which neither participant withers but both seem, somehow, to find fertile ground in which to bloom? Or at least 'create' before they die, divorce or disappear into obscurity. Think of notorious creative pairs: Lizzie Siddal and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Unica Zürn and Hans Bellmer, Leonora Carrington and Max Ernst, Alice B. Toklas and Gertrude Stein, Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes, Francis Bacon and George Dryer, Man Ray and Lee Miller, and let's not forget the Fire Island *folie à quatre*: Jared French, Margaret Hoening, Paul Cadmus and George Tooker. Some of twosomes are platonic, but their symbiotic exchanges no less intense take for instance the portrait by Henry Taylor of his dear friend, artist Deana Lawson.

Ukiński incorporated his own history into this exhibition, including an iconic early portrait that Elizabeth Peyton made of him in the mid 1990s, as well as creating a new oil painting that references his own *folie à deux* with his wife Alison Gingeras, after his infamous advertorial centrefold of her ass in *Artforum* - cheekily pairing this revisitation of

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his own work with Félix Vallotton's fetishistic 1884 painting *Etude de fesse*. This erotic tension is echoed in other works such as Andrew Wyeth's secret portrait of his muse Helga, *Lover* (1981), Nan Goldin's portrait of her then girlfriend Siobahn Lidell, Jenna Gribbon's portrait of the artist Chloe Wise, and Richard Kern's photograph of artist Lucy McKenzie.

Far from labelling these relationships 'crazy', this exhibition is inspired by the complexities and psychic intensities that animates this collection of notorious twosomes who immortalized their intensive couplings on canvas, paper or film as part of their art practice.

Hard Facts:

Massimo De Carlo VSpace

massimodecarlo.com

From November 27 until December 17, 2020

Opening Friday, November 27 5pm CET (Milan) / 4pm GMT (London) / 11pm HKT (Hong Kong) / 8am PST (Los Angeles) / 11am EST (New York)

The VSpace is powered by Wide VR

Information:

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