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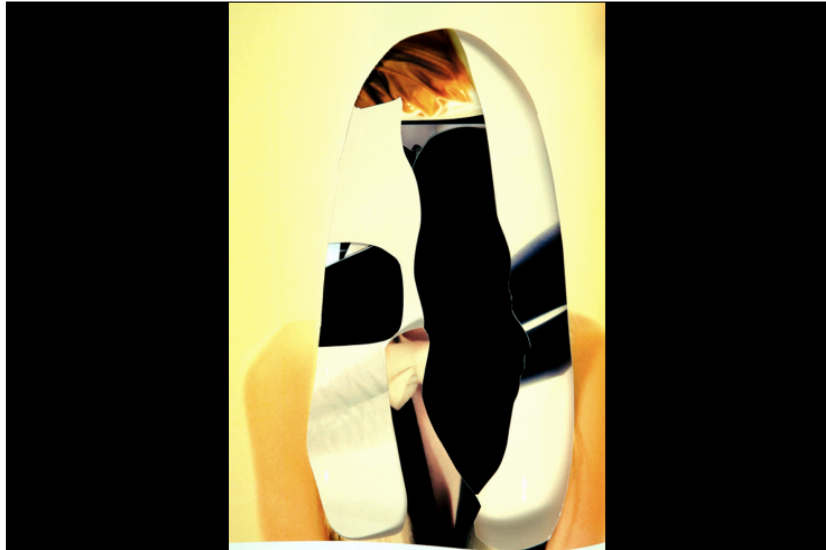
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Out There Wednesday, July 25, 2012 | By Matthew Leifheit | 8 Comments

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Through the Glass Ceiling, Into the White Cube: 31 Women in Art Photography

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Glamorous Day-Dream #053

Katherine di Turi



Curators Natalia Sacasa and Jon Feinstein make no generalizations. Their show, "31 Women in Art Photography," is a varied and diverse state-of-the-union of art photography encompassing all genres. The fact that each of the 31 photographs in the show was made by a female artist had no bearing on its curation. Feinstein first came up with the idea for the show as a response to increasing awareness of the male domination of the New York art world. He is quick to cite an article written in 2006 by Jerry Saltz of *The Village Voice* that begins, "When it comes to being artists, women can be as bad as men," and goes on to scold every major gallery and museum in New York City for not allowing bad art by women to be shown at the same rate as men. A feminist collective called Brainstormers has presented research of the same ilk since 2005 detailing the grossly disproportionate representation of work by male over female artists in bluechip galleries and major institutions. Feinstein and the nonprofit arts organization he co-founded in 2005 called Humble Arts Foundation saw an opportunity. The show they made offers women artists real estate in gallery shows without bias. "The whole reason we created Humble was to have it be a really democratic process and to find ways of showing really established photographers in the same context as recent graduates who we felt were making engaging or promising work," says Feinstein.

"31 Women in Art Photography" is now in its third incarnation. It has moved from its roots in a modest Brooklyn space where the first show was held in 2008 to a swanky white cube in Chelsea. Feinstein, who has curated the show each year with a different female co-curator, is this time working with Natalie Sacasa, senior director of another Chelsea gallery, Luhring Augustine. Despite Sacasa's background in commercial galleries, she was able to be totally free in making her decisions for the show. "I didn't take any commercial concerns into consideration when I was making selections," she says. "For me it was definitely a taste perspective I wanted to present. These are the people I think are the foremost practitioners in this medium."

Amid the thousands of submissions received this year, a theme emerged: both men and women are making more pictures in studio, creating the object of their vision rather than going out in to the world to seek it. "There's a real consciousness of a non documentarian aesthetic," says Sacasa. "People are not going out in the world so much to search out images that are meaningful to them, they are more creating them themselves." Whatever the difference between photographs made by men to those made by women, the array of pictures in this year's show is stunning.

One photograph in particular, made by Lourdes Jeanette, stands out from the rest. It's an image of men acting very traditionally masculine, half naked and fighting. The exhibition's curators see this work as representative of a current trend. Sacasa proclaims exuberantly, "The reason why I like it so much is because while it's flash photography, documenting something that's going on, it's almost as straight a photo as you can get, it has this incredible sculptural quality. The bodies at a certain point cease to be bodies and become volumes and forms. It's representative of a new direction."

This show is exciting because a platform has been created for the exclusive purpose of women having a voice in New York art institutions. From humble beginnings this show hangs in one of the most respectable galleries showing photography today, and that is a historical triumph for women and photography both.

"31 Women in Art Photography" will be on view at the Hasted Kraeutler Gallery in New York from July 26 to Aug. 17, 2012.

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