

Art in America

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REVIEW OF EXHIBITIONS

Nan Goldin at Matthew Marks

Nan Goldin's snapshot-style Cibachromes filled the gallery with the latest installment of her life-in-progress. Over 100 new images were displayed, many including recurring characters who are by now familiar friends (old pal David, with chiseled cheekbones and empathic gaze; the balding, hawklike Guido), and others with fresh faces. Goldin's portraits are

awkward yet seem to visually pry open their subjects. At the same time, her work is self-congratulatory-proud of its rumpled beds, its sex and its quasi-exotic locales, which always smack of geographic social climbing. A friend swims in a pool at the Chateauneuf de Gadagne, a fire burns in Napoleon's hearth on Elba, a windswept Goldin on the Sicilian coast at Lavanzo looks out with a visionary gaze.

Much bedroom time (Avignon, Paris, New York City, Sag Harbor) is spent with a young, tubercularly gaunt French couple, Aurele and Joana, and their son Lou. There are Goldinesque voyeurisms: Aurele and Joana embracing, his hand plunged into her panties; the three taking a French-style family bath naked; Lou proudly pissing into a toilet. Goldin's true genius lies not so much in her compositions, high-keyed color or even her ability to get people to undress; it lies in her gift for imperceptibly injecting a sense of low-level, soap-opera drama, as with *Joana upset*, *Chateauneuf de Gadagne*, *Avignon May 2000*, into what otherwise might be tedious shots.

Goldin, despite herself, is a one-woman legend-factory; the artist's tragic heroin relapse after being clean for eight years was the theme of her 1998 Matthew Marks exhibition. This time, however, there didn't seem to be a unifying story line. One quasi-narrative photo

sequence appeared to reprise a drug-rehab theme. "Suite 22, 57 Days, Summer NYC 2000" begins with the image of a hospital bed, proceeds with shots of worried friends looking on and concludes with a bed freshly made and ominously empty. But, like the rest of the show, although laden with grim symbols of death, the actual details, including full-linen room service, seemed rather benign.

Large photo-grid wall works--*From Here to Maternity 1986-2000* (babies, pregnant bellies, breast-feeding) and *POSITIVE 1993-2000*, as in *HIV* (shots of burning candles and darkened mirrors mixed with portraits of friends)—brought together images old and new to illustrate life themes. Also on hand were a few of Goldin's more recent lyrical images, mostly landscapes. They are uncharacteristically pretty: a house in darkness is obscured by big fluffy snowflakes; a lavender mist creates a luminous Turner-esque blur.

Goldin's work, like that now-vanished East Village milieu it emerged from, seems to want to have things both ways. It is ostensibly bohemian but filled with bourgeois longings for power and position. It is graphic without being truly revealing; the viewer is allowed to peer in but never really see.

--Carey Lovelace

Nan Goldin: *An afternoon in L'Hotel, Paris*, 1999-2000, 15 mounted Cibachrome prints, 56½ by 70½ inches; at Matthew Marks.

