

PORTFOLIO

Aneta Bartos

By Elisabeth Biondi

This summer, for the third year in a row, Aneta Bartos will return to Tomaszów Mazowiecki, a small rural town in Poland, to photograph Zbigniew Bartos. He is a retired schoolteacher and lifelong bodybuilding devotee who has lived his entire life in this serene countryside. He is also Aneta's father. Nearing his 70th birthday, he had asked her to do a series of portraits before his fit body fell prey to inevitable physical decline.

Bartos had come back for a visit with a vague agenda – she was looking for a new photographic project. In New York she had been working on a number of projects exploring the human physique, desirability, and sexuality. She considers her pictures to be both sexual and feminist, and her relaxed attitude towards nudity often challenges American prudishness. She had left Poland at the age of 16 and enjoyed her visits home, which brought back sweet memories of her childhood and her father.

The idyllic Polish countryside of Bartos's childhood seems barely changed and therefore the perfect setting for her father's portraits. In his collaboration with her, he proudly displays his body, and she eternalizes him as an almost mythical figure of strength and desirability. She says that once her father entrusted himself to her vision, she forgot that she was a daughter photographing her father, though she was aware that she was taking pictures of her idol. This paradox creates an edgy ambiguity in her photographs.

The pastoral setting is a romanticized portal to Bartos's past. Her father's poses are often heroic; at times the pictures are playful and flirty, almost seductive. Seen together, they display the sadness of a man who knows he is aging, with the subtext of his waning sexuality. They are bittersweet images of time passing and memories being preserved.

REVIEWS

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