



CLINGY, EMOTIONAL & CO-DEPENDENT? WHERE DO I SIGN UP?

As for a daguerreotype, the sitter must remain still and composed for what seems like an eternity—if the subject moves a few millimeters the image is ruined. But the means by which Aaronson contacted his subjects—searching the Internet and then communicating with them via email—is very much of our times. And the installation as a whole is self-consciously postmodern, as concerned with issues of identity as Cindy Sherman's explorations of female stereotypes or Nan Goldin's ongoing autobiography. Without turning the camera on himself or on his audience, Aaronson nonetheless asks us about who we are in the age of rampant online information-sharing: How do we construct a personality? What are we looking for in ourselves and others? And ultimately how do others see us and judge us?

Ann Landi is a contributing editor of *ARTnews* and the author of *The Schirmer Encyclopedia of Art*.

KASHYA HILDEBRAND GALLERY

531-539 West 25th St.,
New York, NY, 10001, USA
Tel: +1 212 366-5757
Fax: +1 212 366-4747

Gallery opening hours:
Tuesday to Saturday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.
or by appointment

Talstrasse 58,
8001 Zurich, Switzerland
Tel: +41 44 210 02 02
Fax: +41 44 210 02 15

info@kashyahildebrand.org
www.kashyahildebrand.org

JEFFREY AARONSON MAYBE IT'S YOU



CURVY DIFFICULT WOMAN SEEKING BRAVE UNUSUAL MAN
30" x 40" Digital Chromogenic Print from Original 20" x 24" Polaroid

Since their introduction as collage elements in the works of early 20th-century painters—most notably Braque and Picasso—words have always held a special fascination for artists. They can be used as design elements or as signifiers. They may hold a special meaning for the artist, or they may be used to evoke a time and place. For contemporary installation artists, sophisticated recording devices have allowed for words to be used in whole new contexts, adding an aural dimension to the art or supplying a spoken narrative to visual mediums.

So perhaps it is not surprising that words provided the inspiration and underpinnings for Jeffrey Aaronson's most recent body of photographs. As he tells it, he was lying in bed one night and thinking about how the new century has been defined by the use of keywords and the Internet to find everything on the planet, from the migration route of the monarch butterfly to the best deals on a facelift in Thailand. Considering

"how language and words are such a big part of the way we find things," he says, led to thinking about another Internet phenomenon: the proliferation of dating sites in which users attempt to describe themselves and their hopes for prospective romance.

In effect, people seeking partners online are creating portraits of themselves, using words to forge an identity that may or not be connected with a visual image. Aaronson became fascinated by descriptions he found in the personals section of Craigslist, which offers postings throughout the United States. He sought out those whose ads did not include photographs, emailing to inquire if they would be interested in posing for portraits. Many—most of them women—responded enthusiastically; others suspected a scam of some sort.

Eventually he collected 75 subjects and made arrangements to use studios in Dallas, Denver, Las Vegas and Chicago. For

this project, he found a custom designed a 20-by-24-inch field camera fitted with a Polaroid back that is a curious marriage of 19th-century technology and up-to-the minute production: the Polaroid film for this project results in larger-than-life, 20-by-24-inch prints which are then reproduced as 30-by-40-inch Digital Prints. Aaronson deliberately chose this huge camera, so that he would be hidden from the subjects' view, allowing them a private space in which to reveal themselves. The unusual intimacy makes for what Aaronson describes as a kind of "confessional."

Those confessional aspects were further reinforced by the photographer's request that each subject read aloud his or her personals description, which Aaronson then recorded just prior to the sitting. The upshot is a multidimensional kind of portraiture comprising words, image, and sound. It is also a kind of portraiture to which the viewer can bring yet another

interpretation: How do the words fit with the picture? Or the sound of the voice with the description? Ultimately the subjects (and possibly the viewers) are asked to confront issues of identity: Who are you and what are you looking for?

Identity has been the province of portraiture since the beginnings of art history. Ancient Egyptians and Greeks preferred an idealized version of the self; proud Romans were happier with warts-and-all depictions, as were many of the early Netherlandish subjects who appear as donors in devotional pictures. In many eras, to have your portrait painted or sculpted was a sign of high birth, unusual merit, or outstanding attractiveness. And the artist was often complicit in making the subject appear as noteworthy as possible. We will never know, for example, if Gainsborough's great beauties were as slender and elegant as their portraits would have us believe.

But with the invention of the camera in the early 19th cen-

tury, portraiture would soon be available to almost anyone who would sit still for long enough (and in earlier times, that could mean as much as 90 seconds for sufficient exposure on the film). It's long been a conceit among those who know little about photography that the "camera never lies," but one has only to study the history of the subject to know how much manipulation is possible, whether it's a gauzy image by Julia Margaret Cameron or a "photo-shopped" digital print by both contemporary professionals and amateurs.

Aaronson's portraits seem almost painfully honest, though the Polaroid film he chose for this project has a painterly quality that renders flesh tones in a pearly and lucent way. That honesty appears to be underlined by each subject's self-revelations and yearnings on tape. But is this truly "honesty"? Does one young woman's self-description as "scary and damaged" fit her likeness? And how honest are any of us when it comes

to setting our personalities down on paper (or on a computer screen)?

As a long-time photojournalist, Aaronson has been charged with the task of capturing the visual "truth" of world events, such as the student demonstrations in Tiananmen Square or Britain's return to Hong Kong. As an artist, he has more freedom to explore the deeper questions about truth and self-revelation. And like many of his contemporaries, his art is concept-driven. He is not worried about developing a signature "style" in the time-honored tradition of photographers such as Ansel Adams or Cartier-Bresson. Ideas drive the work in a way that earlier artists would not have recognized, as so many generally characterized their aims as searching for a subject, a happy accident, or the "decisive moment."

As his camera is a marriage of 19th-century technology and state-of-the-art printing processes, so is the actual final work.

IF THEY SAY THEIR "NORMAL": F#CKING RUN



I WANT MORE THAN SEX!



SPOIL ME ++++++



NOT YOUR AVRAGE BUT AVRAGE GUY



40 YEAR OLD POKER PLAYER



SEXY GRANDMOTHER WANTING DANCE PARTNER

