

STEPHEN BULGER GALLERY

SARAH ANNE JOHNSON

Wonderlust

Exhibition Dates: March 1 – March 29, 2014

Reception for the Artist: Saturday, March 1, 2-5pm

We are pleased to announce our fourth solo exhibition of work by Sarah Anne Johnson, which addresses the psychology and physicality of intimacy.

In “Wonderlust,” Johnson intends these photographs to “explore the internal world of sexual intimacy. To show what it looks and feels like. Some of these images represent desires for romance, ecstasy and emotional connection, while others depict boredom, self doubt and personal disappointment.” The impetus of this project was Johnson’s desire to tackle a new and challenging subject. Although intimacy was not commonly a topic of discussion in her own life, Johnson broached the theme with friends; some of whom became early subjects. They, and others, introduced her to people they knew who might consider posing. She travelled to several cities to photograph her subjects in their homes during the day. Johnson followed the lead of her subjects, initially photographing them in the nude, while some couples chose to engage in sexual activity, which she documented with their consent. She then worked with the resulting prints in her studio.

Early into her practice Johnson was disappointed with how her photographs only conveyed part of the story. In her previous series “Tree Planting” and “The Galapagos Project,” in an effort to tell a larger truth, she constructed models and made elaborate sets that she would stage to represent something she was unable to otherwise photograph. Showing the documentary photographs alongside the fabricated photographs achieved her ambitions. As in her previous series, “Arctic Wonderland,” she uses the photograph as a base for manipulation to fabricate the image. Adding materials such as paints, re-touching inks and glitter, as well as incorporating burning, scratching and gouging, each photograph is a unique attempt to make visual what is felt physically and emotionally while in the warmth of intimacy or the throws of ecstasy.

The interplay between the authenticity of the couples seen in their domestic surroundings and her manipulations of the photograph’s surface are sometimes raw, tender or ecstatic. These additions convey the wide range of physical and emotional experiences of intimacy and sex. They also serve to obscure the identities of her subjects and retain the privacy of these intimate moments; whether escapist, tantric, ridiculous, aggressive or lonely - each piece exposes a deeply personal moment. Johnson explores, critiques and celebrates lovemaking and sexuality as a whole. As an onlooker, we feel the tension between voyeurism, bashfulness and sentimentality.

In characteristic form, Johnson has conceived of this as a self contained project, as in “Tree Planting,” “The Galapagos Project,” “House on Fire” and most recently “Arctic Wonderland.” Johnson received her MFA from Yale University and a BFA from University of Manitoba. Her work is featured in numerous public collections including the Guggenheim Museum, NY; The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC; The National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, and The Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, each of which has extensive holdings of her work. She was prominently featured in the “Oh, Canada” show at Mass MOCA and she has recently received commissions from Louis Vuitton, the Winnipeg Art Gallery, and the Bank of Montreal.