

ARTFORUM

REVIEWS



Nan Goldin, *Gilles and Gotscho, Paris, 1992-94/95 (detail)*, five Cibachromes, 11' 7" x 41" each.

NAN GOLDIN

MATTHEW MARKS
GALLERY

How often I need a gentle reminder that life (art) is going on, not somewhere else but here, at hand. This is what people do is what I thought, this is how they live, reminding me I had and am, you have and are. Life has names like Siobhan, Brian, Millie, Scarpota, French Chris, Gilles, Gotscho, Geno, Amanda, Alf Bold, Ric and Randy, Kee, In-

oue, Nyoro, Chisato, Tamika and Cee-lo, David, Dieter, Kiki, Cookie and Vittorio and Max, Suzanne, and Jimmy Paul. There is life and there is beauty, concepts most themselves when becoming one another.

Art as hymn or ballad to life, only too aware of the brutal nonchalance of death, denies any sentimentality. In *Gilles and Gotscho, Paris, 1992-94/95*, Goldin embraces everything, despite the pain of it; it is an embrace that haunts her show—sadly, gorgeously in *Ric and Randy, embracing, Easthampton, 1994*, and harrowingly in the slide that closes *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, two skeletons arm in arm, body to body. To see Goldin's work, as some have, through the distorting lenses of romanticism and sentimentality is to propose her aesthetic as some corrective or antidote to life, which it never is; it is not like life, or life as someone wishes it were or will be, but as complex and contrary as the thing itself.

Goldin's show was a retrospective in the way only a photographer's show could be. By placing older and more recent work in grids, Goldin meditated on the medium itself: What is the "time" of photography—its past, its now? How does a photographic blur mark what is always missing in the very act of photographing it? AIDS has changed the act of seeing: fragility, time's brevity, relentless loss—of friends, of bodies—for so long easily viewed as burdens only of the old, now shadow and bond us all. By exploring the connection between the photograph and the slide, Goldin tests the vision's duration, what remains in you before randomly sliding into oblivion.

Goldin's oeuvre is breathtakingly, radically generous, but as the slides in *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* insist never has a work so giving emphasized so well the speed with which everything is taken away. Confronted by the mechanics of Goldin's slide show—projectors, slides in carousels—

everything was clicking like a timepiece, light to no light in between; it only stopped to begin again. It is not possible to stop it, it goes on, and it moves. No memento mori, her work enacts the transitory.

The new work included photographs from Goldin's recent trip to Japan (where she collaborated with Nobuyoshi Araki). In *Honda brothers in cherry blossom storm, Tokyo, 1994*, Goldin shows two dazzling and joyous young men; it is a photo so life-filled it replenishes oxygen the way a forest does. By testing photography's limits—snapshot, film still—Goldin shows how cinematic a photograph can become and remain, importantly, a photograph; how it accomplishes things cinema cannot: stars can be seen daily by positioning the frame of fame and glamour's amour, their dizzying glow encompassing everyone in sight, here and now, not elsewhere. Her photographs are a still yet moving presence that thwarts everything working against them. The subject of *Nyoro on her sofa, Tokyo, 1994*, a woman whose matter-of-fact ease is stunning, rests while slants of light stroke her kimono. Topless, *en maquillage, Inoue in his kitchen, Tokyo, 1994*, shows a boy smiling his way to becoming someone else entirely by remaining who he is; with a white towel wrapped around his waist, he exudes a confidence that is almost curative.

Goldin has learned important lessons from Peter Hujar's, David Wojnarowicz's, and Larry Clark's autobiographies of elegance, obsession, anger, and pain, but another artist who frequently came to mind looking at this amazing body of work was Caravaggio—a Caravaggio in the drag of now. For both, life is always more interesting than death, for death is only ever, although insistently and painfully, part of life; anything else is a question of faith. And Goldin's work is evidence of the awe of it all.

—Bruce Hainley