

Reconstructing *DiNGIRĒ*

The Black Swan Project Susan DeFreitas

“A black swan is an outlier, an event that lies beyond the realm of normal expectations. Most people expect all swans to be white because that’s what their experience tells them; a black swan is by definition a surprise.”

- Nassim Nicholas Taleb
LEARNING TO EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED [4.19.04]

It came to my attention, of all things, via Myspace, that there was a local photographer doing potentially ground-breaking work in Prescott. So ground-breaking, in fact that he was working under an alias. Welcome to the Black Swan Project.

If it can be stated succinctly, the aim of the Black Swan Project is to find out what women find sexy and portray it photographically. To date, the photographer in question has interviewed over 50 women—straight, lesbian and bi, young and old, white and Hispanic—with one simple question: *What, to you, is sexy?* The responses have been both the kind of thing you’d expect and the kind of thing you really wouldn’t. Hence the moniker, “a black swan.”

From the information he’s gathered, the photographer—let’s call him ABS—subtracts anything he considers “male motif fantasy.” This is the kind of stereotypically sexy stuff you’d get from television, movies, billboards, magazines or essentially just living and breathing in the US (provided you’re not Amish.) In the material left over, ABS looks for themes; let’s call them “female motif fantasy.” He then attempts to render those themes photographically.

In my opinion, this project is the opposite of pornography. Not because some of the images aren’t hot and steamy enough

to send rush of blood to whatever genitalia you may possess, but rather because pornography, as we know it, is predominantly the record of what *men* consider a turn-on. By catering to that, the various forms of media in our society have created a kind of hegemony of desire, coming largely to dictate what both women and men think of as sexy.

Some of these images are both challenging and startling, particularly those involving depictions of male strength and force, as in the image *Symbols and Hands* (please see website for un-concealed image) and *The Wish*, which struck me at first as denigrating to women. And yet, *strident feminists beware*. The photographer himself may be male, but these photographs are based on actual female motifs. In the case of these two photographs, “strong, forceful hands” and “hair-pulling/tugging.”

Others are simply interesting, such as *Skin*. On first glance, this image could be an ad for bathsoap. And yet, what on earth could be sexier than bare skin? How have we been made to buy the idea that if it’s not T & A, it’s not sexy? Go figure.



Waiting in a Secret Place



The Wish

Symbols and Hands (concealed)




Perhaps the most intriguing image is *Waiting in a Secret Place*. Because it’s simply hard to imagine any piece of male-concept pornography based around the act of waiting. The figure asks us to stay quiet, to keep her secret: she’s waiting for her lover. What’s most sexy about the image is the fact that sex is *about to occur*. What a concept. In this image, there’s nothing but anticipation in its purest form, creating a kind of paralysis, imagined both literally and figuratively in this photograph.

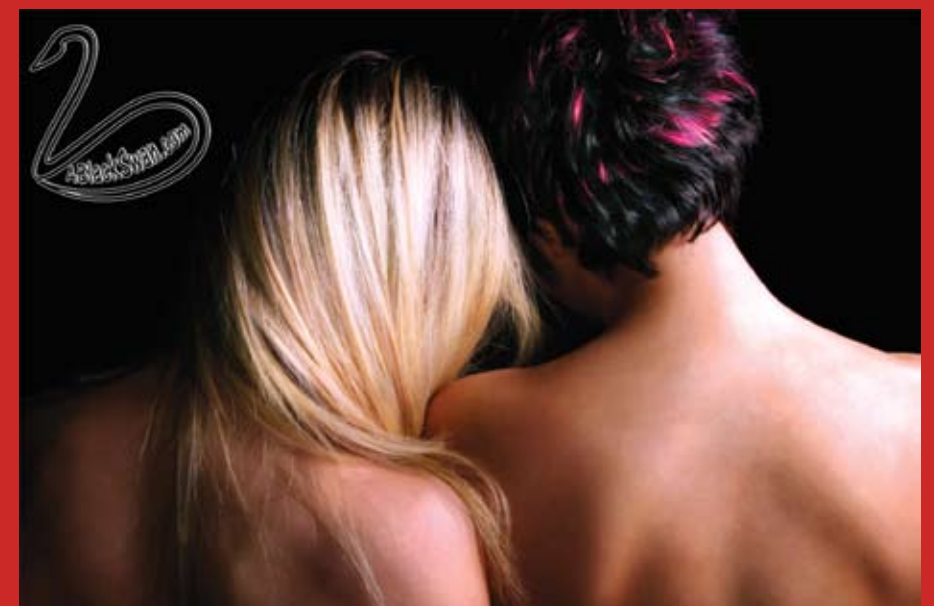
You can almost feel the prickles of heightened sensation, the memory of a delicious encounter, the anticipation of one to come. Or maybe, you can if you’re a woman.

ABS has now moved to a format in which the Black Swan Committee, comprised of three women of various sexual orientations, select the poses for the model or models involved in the shoot. (This was created in order to subtract the male photographer from the equation as much as possible; at this point, ABS simply shows up to take the pictures.) Motifs they’re planning to tackle in the future include: Shoes, Hands, Facial Hair, and Goddesses.

So far, a number of metropolitan galleries have expressed interest in this work. You can stay tuned to its development at www.ABlackSwan.com.

PS - Women, if there’s something “off the radar” you personally find sexy—or you’d like to find out more about the project—you can contact the photographer at abs@ablackswan.com. 

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Skin