

DIRECTIONS

Dana Hoey

November 16, 2000 – February 19, 2001



Uti, 2000, Cibachrome, 30 x 45 in. (76.2 x 114.3 cm). Collection Tim McCoy.

DANA HOEY CREATES extraordinarily beautiful photographs that are elegantly composed, deeply saturated in color, and charged by emotionally and visually complex subject matter. Hoey's photographs are staged. In them, friends and performers are arranged according to a preconceived scenario for which she often makes preparatory sketches, drawings, or diagrams to map out the positions of the figures (see back cover).

Hoey's early photographic images are of women caught in conflicts or power struggles. The subjects engage in intense physical contact or, conversely, occupy the same physical space while seeming to be psychologically worlds apart. Although some of the photographs are exaggerated to the point of humor, others, such as *A Lesson for Bobo*, 1995 (full-page color plate), are complex, enigmatic, and clearly chilling. Hoey introduced male figures for the first time in recent photographs, ambiguously as in *Ui*, 2000 (cover), with a man's shorts and legs in the foreground, or less so as in *Tribeca*, 1999, in which the male figure appears languorous and compliant—a reversal of Paul Gauguin's depictions of Tahitian women or Édouard Manet's female models in his famous *Luncheon on the Grass*, 1863 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris).

This exhibition includes photographs taken by the artist in Hawaii and Los Angeles in the spring and summer of 2000. Although they are also staged, the Hawaii photographs are more nuanced than her previous work, often involve larger groups of people, and are less explicitly narrative. They evoke simultaneously the casualness of snapshots, the false intimacy of advertisements, and associations with art historical references. The image of two women reclining on Astro Turf

with their hair blowing in the wind (*Waimea*, 2000), for example, suggests the classicizing monumentality of a painting by Gustave Courbet—or is it a shampoo commercial?—revealing the romanticism and subliminal eroticism that is common to nineteenth-century masterworks and contemporary commercials.

Hoey considers herself a realist, someone who "ought to be a documentary photographer" but is not. She uses as many as ten rolls of film during each "shoot," in the course of which the actors relax and thus gradually personalize or reinterpret, and thereby modify, the roles and poses in which they were originally positioned. The final prints resonate with that disparity between the planned and the spontaneous. Based on formal decisions of framing and composition, the images also hover between tableaux and snapshots, artifice and reality. To the extent that they seem to exist in the gap between realism and performance, Hoey's pictures occupy a terrain explored by contemporary artists as diverse as Rineke Dijkstra, Nan Goldin, Sam Taylor-Wood, and Jeff Wall, as well as a younger generation of consciously theatrical "girl" photographers with whom Hoey has sometimes been grouped. The uniqueness of her images resides in their expression of her deeply held beliefs about society and her fantasies as they coincide with those of her subjects.

In the interview that follows, edited and excerpted from a written exchange between curator and artist over the summer of 2000, Hoey discusses her methods and subject matter.

Phyllis Rosenzweig
Associate Curator



Hoey photographing in a skating rink in southern California. Reproduced from a color photograph by Mary C. Greening, 2000.

PR: You start with an image in mind and work toward its realization rather than search for "found" subject matter, the way a traditional, "straight" photographer would. Why be a photographer rather than a painter? Do questions of exploitation and voyeurism, which have dogged the history of documentary photography, have anything to do with your preference for setting up the situations?

DH: The first part of the question could be posed in reverse to a plein air painter. I accept the power of photography wholeheartedly, and projecting my experience via the camera is totally physical and natural. I see myself as a realist working in a realm not so far off from documentary photography, but my pictures have to be set up because I describe ephemeral, felt moments. I think I would have captured very few scenes at this point if I had not staged them. Exploitation and voyeurism are part of the content of my work. Sometimes the models understand what we are making. Other times I impose an ominous tone that they may not perceive. But my ambition is to create a hard-core political dialectic, and I have to believe that the latter process is for the greater good.

PR: Are the extreme close-ups and unexpected croppings part of your

original concept of the pictures? Are they related to your use of various types of film?

DH: Compositionally I've had a sequence of influences: in my early works, Courbet, the flat space of nineteenth-century painting, and commercial photography; then, certain black-and-white photographers and filmmakers; and, in the current work, Courbet and Gauguin and commercial photography again. From 1995 to 1997, I shot C-prints [color negative prints] because they were soft and lovely and made a low-contrast, matte surface that registered the connection between the photographs and nineteenth-century narrative painting. In 1998, I changed to silver-gelatin [black-and-white] prints, a medium that marries cinematic form with classic documentary style and suited the content. These photographs suggest a continuous, though deliberately bifurcated, narrative about the search for a missing man, which was figuratively a search for a kind of hyper, interior masculinity that I wanted to impart to my female models, and also literally, truthfully, a search for a real person, my brother who is somewhere in the Arizona area. In my most recent work, I use Cibachrome [a process of printing directly from transparencies] because I want to reintegrate the degraded commercial aspect of this new, extremely seductive, brightly colored, high-contrast media with my new subject matter.

My work is informed by the "form follows function" impulse of modernism. The best photo is one that results from the most effective use of the camera and film. But I am not a modernist because the content of my pictures does not "equal" the form. I think of my images as more metaphorical than literal.

PR: Are the Hawaii photographs less overtly staged than your earlier photos?

DH: Ui and the other models were all chosen by my assistant, Ana Yarawamai. My relationship to the models, some of whom I had never met, may contribute to the documentary-like, realistic feel of the Hawaii photos. Although I had predetermined the shots, I had to react to the models on site and intuitively.

My earlier photos worked as an internal dialog and critique of, by, and for girls and women; and, unintentionally, as a semi-erotic experience for some viewers. I recoiled at the unintended effect and started posing the models in parkas and baggy pants—not a complete solution. So I began to consciously incorporate the semi-erotic element into the content by allowing masculinity into the pictures. In Hawaii, I took the classic, exoticizing form of Gauguin and within that relaxed, seductive, beautiful form, portrayed some of my female experiences of rivalry, love, eroticism, physicality, and being looked at. My experience of the models is projected, like Gauguin's, and I incorporate that distance into the images.

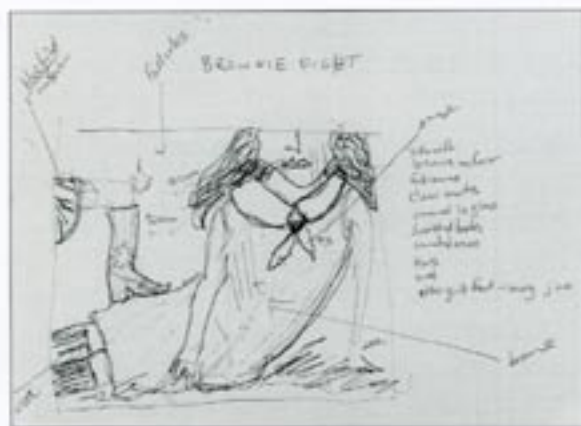
PR: The Los Angeles mud-wrestling pictures feel related to your earlier photos, which often seem to be about direct physical confrontation. The Hawaii pictures are more ambiguous and, despite the great physical presence of the models, the power relationships seem more psychological.

DH: The Hawaii and L.A. pictures are joined at the heart. The Hawaii ones depict innocence and latent conflict and the mud ones are the realization of the opposite of innocence—experience. In the L.A. pictures the mud-wrestling "captain," Marianne, was also cast by someone else, so there is a correlation

between them. She had acted in wrestling shows and was a superstar of adult films in the 1980s. Now she is a make-up artist and mother. Her experience and age are central to the photographs. The other two models are my friends, who have nowhere near her degree of physical strength and skill. In these photographs I wanted to show the debased nature of female rivalry, and, with this direct display of her primacy, to contradict the social construct that women lose their power as they get older. I also want to claim absolutely my right to make a real, even extreme, sexual statement. Lately, I've been using a directing technique like that of filmmaker Mike Leigh's, in which I cast according to the people I'm interested in, then let their personalities develop and dictate the action in the photo. The mud-wrestling photos are a combination of "method acting" techniques (except this time the warm-up is the performance) and the personality-dominant, "realist" technique. Marianne, the pro, directed the models and controlled the set, which is an ideal realization of the power I want her to stand for.



A Lesson for Bobo, 1995, C-print, 40 x 30 in. (101.6 x 76.2 cm). Collection Anthony T. Podesta, podesta.com, Washington, D.C.



Brownie Fight, c. 1998, ballpoint pen on paper, 8½ x 11 in. (21.6 x 27.9 cm).

BIOGRAPHY

Born in San Francisco, 1966. Received B.A. in Philosophy, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut, 1989; M.F.A., Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, 1997.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York, 1997, 1999.

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1996 "Sugar Mountain," White Columns, New York; "a / drift," Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York; Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York (also 2000).

1997 "The Name of the Place," Casey Kaplan Gallery, New York.

1999 "Another Girl, Another Planet," Lawrence Rubin • Greenberg Van Doren, New York. Exhibition catalog: "Unheimlich/Uncanny," Fotomuseum Winterthur, Switzerland. Exhibition catalog.

2000 "Girlfriend," Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig, Germany; "Innuendo," Dee Glasoe, New York.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alberro, Alexander. "Dana Hoey." *Artforum* 36 (January 1998): 103-4.
- Bollen, Christopher. "Innuendo." *Time Out*, June 29-July 6, 2000, 65.
- Cohen, Michael. "The Love Mechanics: New Feminist Art." *Flash Art* 33 (Summer 2000): 92-93.
- Feaster, Felicia. "Dana Hoey; Amy Adler." *Art Papers* 22 (January/February 1998): 54.
- Frankel, David. "The Name of the Place." *Artforum* 35 (May 1997): 104.
- Halle, Howard. "New Wave: Four Emerging Photographers." *On Paper* (March/April 1998): 32-37.

Homes, A. M. "Hot Shots." *Harper's Bazaar*, February 2000, 250-55, 280-81.

Pollock, Barbara. "Lights, Action, Camera!" *Art News* 99 (February 2000): 126-31.

Saltz, Jerry. "Group Show." *Time Out*, August 26-September 4, 1996, 27.

Siegel, Katy. "Another Girl, Another Planet." *Artforum* 38 (September 1999): 161.

Smith, Roberta. "Dana Hoey." *New York Times*, September 12, 1997, C25.

Stahel, Urs. "Thin-Skinned and Ambiguous: Uncanny Beauty, Uncanny Familiarity and Uncanny Everydayness," in *Unheimlich/Uncanny*. Winterthur, Switzerland: Fotomuseum Winterthur, 1999.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Unless otherwise indicated, all photographs are Cibachrome or Fujiflex prints and are lent courtesy the artist and Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York.

A Lesson for Bobo, 1995, C-print, 40 x 30 in. (101.6 x 76.2 cm). Collection Anthony T. Podesta, podesta.com, Washington, D.C.

Tribeca, 1999, 30 x 45 in. (76.2 x 114.3 cm).

Commander, 2000, 40 x 60 in. (101.6 x 152.4 cm).

EMT, 2000, 20 x 35 in. (50.8 x 88.9 cm).

Panahu, 2000, 30 x 45 in. (76.2 x 114.3 cm).

Li, 2000, 30 x 45 in. (76.2 x 114.3 cm). Collection Tim McCoy.

Wimesa, 2000, 30 x 45 in. (76.2 x 114.3 cm).

4:03:82, 2000, 20 x 35 in. (50.8 x 88.9 cm).

Still from "One Pro, Two Amateurs." 2000, 40 x 60 in. (101.6 x 152.4 cm). Margulies Family Collection.

Prof/Am, 2000, 30 x 45 in. (76.2 x 114.3 cm).

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