

THE PARKETT SERIES WITH CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS / DIE PARKETT-REIHE MIT GEGENWARTSKÜNSTLERN

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In Broad Daylight Am hellichten Tag

More Allure Please

Love to the rhythm, you slave to the rhythm. Grace Jones

Sam Samore is a fantastic fabulist. He invents stories, situations, and compositions. He twists the facts and spreads myths. But he does not give us the comfort of satisfaction because his narratives are unresolved. Their loose ends remain enigmatic; their formulations are never conclusive. Samore's operative modes—photography and fairy tales—function independently but they still have an effect on each

Seduction

Exquisite fragments of breasts and faces fill the picture plane in Sam Samore's photo series, ALLEGORIES OF BEAUTY (INCOMPLETE). Alone, in pairs, or in trios, the women's heads form beguiling, hallucinatory compositions in coarsely grained photographs that diffuse perception and shift reproduction into the realm of appearance. Figures materialize out of nothing and transfigured countenances are mirrored in unreal reflections. Samore's cinematographic eye also comes to rest on other select body parts—a glistening mouth, an elegantly plucked eye-

other. Samore examines neither content nor narrative curves and their stringency. The women, men, and other creatures that populate his oversized, black-and-white pictures and his feverish fairy tales are not specifically selected but seem simply to have a way of turning up. Through the application of a consistently seductive and ephemeral aesthetic, the artist tests the unpredictability of perception.

brow, the nape of a strong neck, a classical profile, a frown. Fragmentary disclosure of the dreamlike images lends them a complexity that almost eludes our grasp. Eternally suspended between symbolic and imaginary spheres, they are structured by the ambivalent glances of their protagonists. Everything seems to mean something, but what? There is a point in every picture that answers our gaze and looks back at us, a point at which we are inscribed in the picture. Here Sam Samore calls for distinct subjectivity. But the photographs, always horizontal in format, still maintain a distance because their vast dimensions endow them with an almost bodily presence.

What is it that gives these pictures their allure? Are they "hard to define, impossible to resist," as

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Chanel describes its latest perfume? Like the two series, *SITUATIONS* (1980s) and *SCENARIOS* (1990s), Samore's *ALLEGORIES OF BEAUTY* are informed with a passion, vibrancy, and mystery—Hitchcock would call it “suspense”—that lends them a compelling, immediate seductiveness. But that is not all. The faces, dramatically highlighted with eyeliner and

lipstick, clearly display the classical ideal of beauty based on harmony, symmetry, and proportion, still in vogue today and epitomized by Nefertiti. And they radiate the unmistakable glamour that marks the glossy magic of the fashion industry. Allure draws on a mixture of seduction and glamour, without which an allegory of beauty is not feasible.

Myth

In Sam Samore's first series, *SITUATIONS*, he cast himself as the director. He hired photographers and instructed them to “go out and photograph as many different kinds of people, situations, age groups, genders, ethnicities as possible.”¹⁾ This procedure allowed him to make the montage of the photographs without knowing anything about the protagonists, their relationships, or the context in which the pictures were taken. He thereby put himself in the position of viewers who must make their own conjectures about the narrative framework.

Suddenly Samore found himself wanting to take the pictures and prepare the documentation himself. The experiment fascinated him given his background in behavioral psychology. Would the pictures look different if he pressed the release button himself? They did not, but Sam Samore does think “it's a good idea to change your myth once in a while.”

The strategy in his latest series, *SCENARIOS*, is entirely different again. Samore instructs actors, mod-

els or friends to improvise on certain moods or modes of behavior. Thus, they may act like cooing lovers, arguing friends, or distant acquaintances who happen to meet on the street. Samore took the same approach in a sequence for the magazine *East/West Avenue*, in which his brief was to create the framework for pictures of attractive young women wearing certain looks. However, the allure of the photo editorial goes far beyond the glossy pages of the fashion magazine. Samore titled the piece *PERSONA*, after Ingmar Bergman's modernist epic. This classic existential movie of 1965 depicts a fluctuation of identities. Everything revolves around the two ethereal personae of Liv Ullmann and Bibi Andersson, who drink cocktails nonstop, smoke cigarettes, and look knock-down-dead chic and transgressive in their turtleneck sweaters. In Bergman's climax, their blonde

*SAM SAMORE, ALLEGORIES OF BEAUTY (INCOMPLETE), 1996:
WOMAN WITH BACK TO MIRROR /
FRAU MIT DEM RÜCKEN ZUM SPIEGEL.*





SAM SAMORE, *ALLEGORIES OF BEAUTY (INCOMPLETE)*, 1996:
TWO MEN / ZWEI MÄNNER.

heads merge into each other in a trick sequence. Before filming *Persona*, Bergman noted, "One second must be able to stretch itself out over a long period of time and contain a handful of lines strewn without any apparent connection."²¹ These are the seconds that Samore has captured and frozen in his photo-

graphs to define that form of spatial temporality that denotes a state of semiconsciousness.

Enchantment

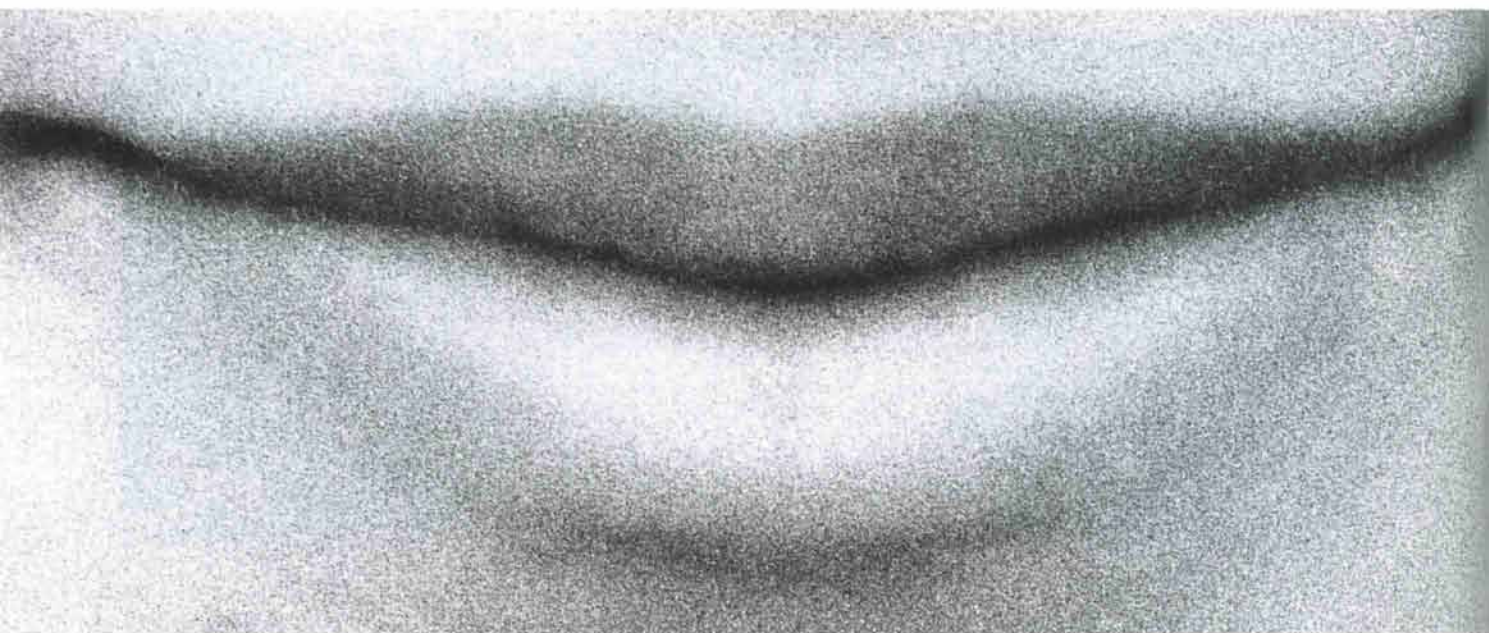
Sam Samore does not title his photographs individually although they each have a highly recognizable visual identity, a "personal" format: for instance, the picture of two men's faces, placed at a diagonal, with drapery that may be a bedsheet. Are the men standing or lying down? Or the blonde woman with thick lips, stirring her cup of coffee and glancing disdainfully over her shoulder. Or the mother and daughter in semiprofile, their synchronized gazes directed toward the lower right corner of the pictorial space.

One could imagine titles like *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Ugly Duckling*, or *Snow White and Rose Red*. This is not a coincidence because, to repeat, Sam Samore is a fabulist, a twister of facts and a maker of myths. He writes charmed rap songs out of frenetic, racing fragments and phrases. He places his free-floating poetry on the windows of churches, boutiques, museums, restaurants, airports, buses, and railroad stations, there functioning as a hybrid element between inside and outside. For the New York exhibition "Shopping"

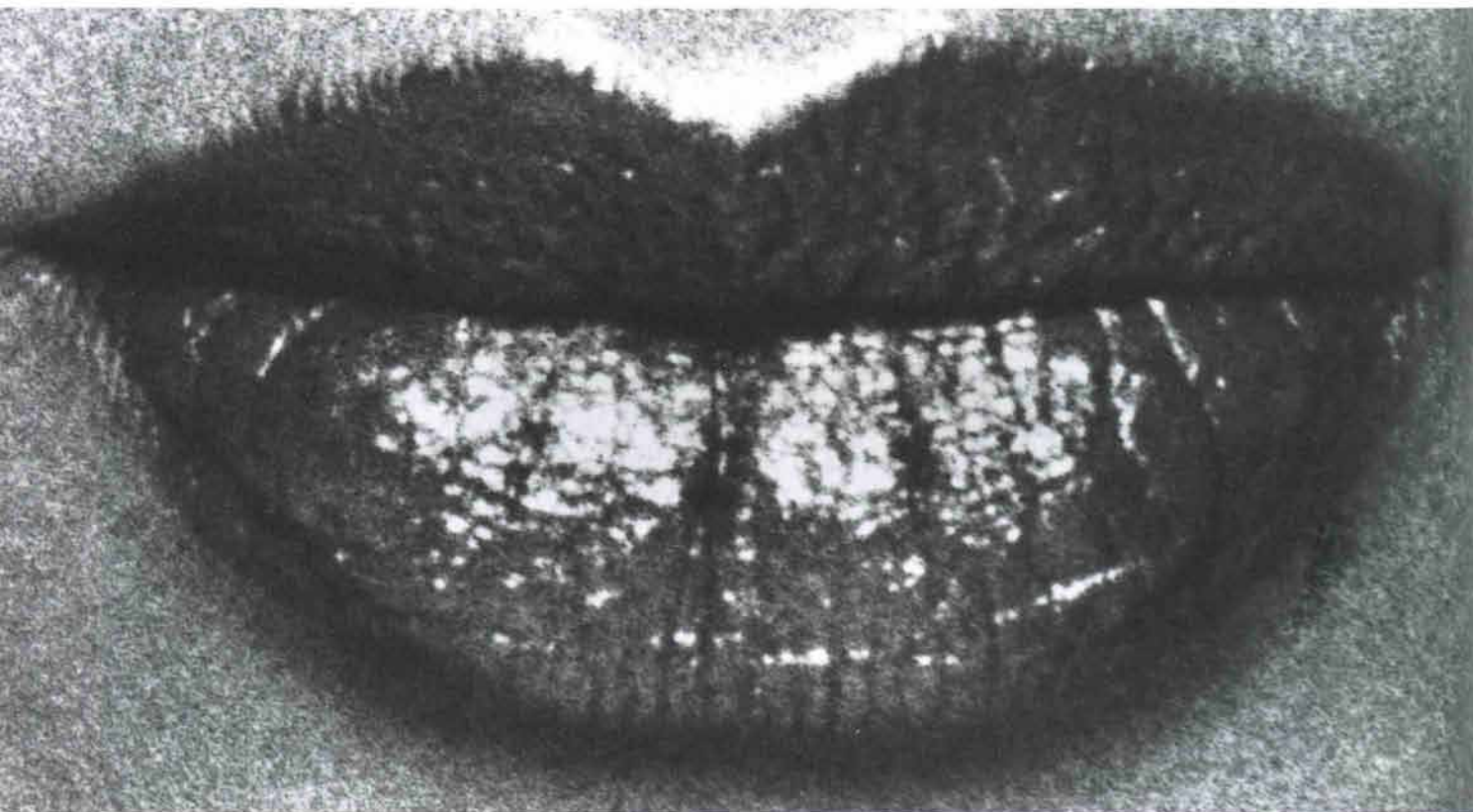
(1996), suitably situated in consumer-happy Soho, he addressed the rituals of beauty and desire by mounting yellow vinyl letters on the window of a cosmetics boutique: *CLIMBING INTO THE SOURCE*. The words monopolize the architectural skin of the boutique, defining it as a site of voluntary, self-imposed transformation.

Sam Samore makes up his own fairy tales as well. In 1994 he published a book deliciously titled *Tangled Web of Erotic Savage Cunning*. Everything in it is turned upside-down although the narratives echo the classic fairy tale with its polarities of the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Wolves, snakes, widows, and their beautiful daughters are all there, but gender and roles are often switched: Anything is possible.

Clever architects—women, of course—use cellular phones to conspire against power-crazed kings, and evil hairy creatures tremble at the thought of losing their testicles. The sexuality is fast and crude; the violence omnipresent and unfiltered. There is no such thing as simple morality or political correct-



SAM SAMORE, ALLEGORIES OF BEAUTY (INCOMPLETE), 1994: LIPS / LIPPEN und / und:
ALLEGORIES OF BEAUTY (INCOMPLETE), 1995: LIPSTICKED LIPS / GESCHMINKTE LIPPEN.



ness. The Brothers Grimm, Ovid, elements from the folklore of Africa and India all weave their way through Samore's tales. He dismantles the structure of the universal fairy tale and carves a "fabulous" path to a new posthuman world order with his trenchant vocabulary. "Like a standup comedian, the tale must sense the aspirations and prejudices, the fears and hunger of its audience."³⁾ In this sense, Samore's fairy tales are the "cyber tales" of tomorrow. His second volume, *Sumptuous Fire of the Stars*, is forthcoming.

Transgression

Sam Samore's body of work simultaneously accentuates and deconstructs difference. Witness the frivolity of excessive female beauty in ALLEGORIES OF BEAUTY and the subversive mix-up of gender in the fairy tales. They conjure visions of an exotic, almost virtual, figure who transcends gender, ethnicity, and stereotype—as personified by Grace Jones. The explosive, panther-like disco-pop diva positions herself with great virtuosity between grotesquerie and supernatural beauty, "to the point," remarks Francette Pacteau in her study of beauty, "where [she] crosses over into another register of being and meaning. Grace Jones is 'barely human'. Her difference is disavowed. Excluded as she might be from the order of the human, her difference would no longer make any difference."⁴⁾ Grace Jones's bizarre beauty, Sam Samore's alluring glamour—both are transgressive to the point of transcendence.

And, as Sam Samore tells us, "This is not the end of the story. From the sky fall four apples. One for you. One for me. One for Dorani, the snake spirit."⁵⁾

(Translation: Catherine Schelbert)

1) This and the following quote are from a conversation between artist and author in September 1996.

2) Ingmar Bergman, *My Life in Film* (London: Faber & Faber, 1995), p. 54.

3) Marina Warner, *The Beast and the Blonde* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994), p. 409.

4) Francette Pacteau, *The Symptom of Beauty* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), pp. 139 ff.

5) Sam Samore, "Return of the Garden," in *Les Contes de Fées se terminent bien*, edited by Frac, Haute Normandie, 1996 (ex. cat.).

SAM SAMORE, *STORIES*, SUMMER 1993.

Poem/song for the windows of All Saints Church, Newcastle, England. Black vinyl letters on 1000 windows; the words (adjectives) were inspired by researching hagiographies, biographies, histories, fairy tales, folk tales relating to the Newcastle and Northumbrian areas of England / GESCHICHTEN, SOMMER 1993, Gedicht/Lied für die Fenster der All Saints Church in Newcastle, England. Schwarze Vinylbuchstaben auf 1000 Fenstern. Die Wörter (Adjektive) nehmen Bezug auf Heiligenlegenden, Biographien, Geschichten, Märchen und Sagen aus der Gegend um Newcastle und Northumberland.

(PHOTO: THOMAS NORDANSTAD-GALLERY, NEW YORK)

