

**BABAK GHAZI, « Girlfriend Photos »**

**Exhibition from January 12th to February 16th 2013**

**Opening on Saturday January 12th from 2pm to 9pm**



Chez Valentin is pleased to present Babak Ghazi's series *Girlfriend Photos*. Taken from Ghazi's ongoing project *Lifework*, these photographs show women in a variety of intimate scenes, all posing for the camera. On first viewing, the title suggests that these might be the artist's own girlfriends, taken from a personal archive. However, as the series continues, the disparity of styles, interiors and ages suggests that at least some of these photographs must be found objects, reframed and removed from a private conversation between two people, and brought into the public space of the art gallery.

These shifts between authored and anonymous, public and private, are central to Ghazi's *Lifework* project which he began in 2008. Organising a vast range of found material, constructed images, objects and research, *Lifework* is somewhere between an archive, a library and a manifesto for living. Box files and crates are named by enigmatic themes such as "Drawings of Friends and Lovers" and "Eyes Closed Poses", alongside those named by person, ranging from Andy Warhol to Kate Moss as well as Ghazi's own lover, the photographer and filmmaker Lisa Castagner. Rather than a straightforward collection, Ghazi has spent a number of years exploring the potential to dissolve and multiply authorship by choreographing found and fabricated material, bringing to life the actions and poses of others. He explains his process by saying "I collect in order to work something out, to name it and then produce it afresh as active expression." Each file is a discovery for the viewer, who must navigate the rows of titled boxes, choosing which ones to open and then comparing the fantasy of what might be contained with the images and objects revealed.

In this new series *Girlfriend Photos* Ghazi 'releases' the material held in one of *Lifework's* box files for the exhibition. Whilst the title might bring to mind Richard Prince's appropriated images of biker chicks (his *Girlfriends* series), Ghazi's emphasis is on the intimacy and relationships documented in the photographs. A more pertinent reference for Ghazi is Gerhard Richter's *Atlas* project, which includes nude photographs of women in domestic settings, a record of the artist's relationships set amongst the encyclopaedic collection of images. Richter's photographs also draw the art viewer back through a history of photographically documenting a lover, bringing to mind series such as Alfred Stieglitz's obsessive, erotic images of Georgia O'Keefe. For Ghazi, as for Richter, rather than uncovering some kind of truth about a person or form, their intimate photographs explore the drive to make a relationship and body public. Many of Ghazi's images were bought online, his series meditating on the new networks of semi-anonymous exhibitionism found on sites ranging from social networking to DIY pornography: personal acts broadcast for public consumption.

By re-scanning and framing the original snapshots, Ghazi creates artworks from long-lost encounters, investing in both the models' and the photographers' actions. As well as the casual voyeurism found when surfing the web or flicking through a magazine, Ghazi wants to explore what compels girlfriends to pose and boyfriends to photograph, finding fascination in these images that are often surprisingly poetic with their pre-digital glitches and determined eroticism. By producing these facsimiles and taking their scenes seriously, Ghazi invites us to think about how, in his words, "identity is being played": not only by these anonymous girlfriends and boyfriends, but also by an artist finding ways of being expressive through the merging of artistic gesture and found object.

Catherine Grant