

SPAIN & 42 ST.

Darja Bajagić

Jimmy DeSana

Peter Hujar

Robert Mapplethorpe

Paul Mpagi Sepuya

Heji Shin

Laurie Simmons

Deborah Turbeville

12 December 2014 to 31 January 2015

SPAIN & 42 ST. is the title of a William S. Burroughs cut-up poem that transforms found fragments of text into a new whole. The works in the exhibition challenge the narratives of photography and fashion and parallels between them, just as Burroughs constantly challenged the structure of prose. They move beyond expectations of fashion or fine art: they are neither exclusively one nor the other. Each is a cut-up in itself and within the context of the exhibition.

The theme of portraiture, both conventional and conceptual, appears throughout. Robert Mapplethorpe's portraits show his keen fashion editorial eye; his photographs showcase his creative direction as much as his models, including fashion icon Dianne B. Photographs from Darja Balagić's online porn thumbnail project are presented as abstracted portraits. The works transform pornographic scenes into delicate poses with soft lines and minimal color. Paul Mpagi Sepuya's studio studies capture the remains of photographic sessions. Fabric is left draped over a chair and on the studio floor; though no one is pictured, their aura persists. Peter Hujar's photo of artist David Wojnarowicz, though posed for a fashion catalog, catches its subject in an unassuming, candid moment. Also shot for a catalog, Jimmy DeSana's photograph of a nude and a nearly-nude model turning from the camera while joined at the butt with a coat hanger takes fashion imagery into a radical realm of desire and the absurd.

Some works have direct links to the fashion world. In Laurie Simmons' photograph of Cindy Sherman in an Issey Miyake bathing suit, floating in a sea of black and white, Sherman could be mistaken for one of Simmons' dolls from her well-known series of images of miniatures. Heji Shin, who works in both fashion and fine art photography, plays with collaged images, double exposures, and abstraction to create surreal, at times grotesque, yet delicate portraits. Deborah Turbeville, who also worked in both fashion and fine art photography, composes images that could be documentation from a spectral fashion shoot where mannequins and humans comingle in crowded studios.

Many of Darja Bajagić's (Titograd, Former Yugoslavia, 1990) images are taken from Eastern European porn and fetish sites. She often rephotographs or scans the originals, printing on pieces of canvas that are incorporated into larger compositions, or mounting them on aluminum. She exposes the power of the gaze, often using chess, puzzle, or crossword motifs.

Jimmy DeSana (Detroit, MI, 1950-1990) was an American photographer and a key figure of the East Village punk art scene of the 1970s and 1980s. His work images the human body in ways ranging from "savagely explicit to purely symbolic". He is best known for his surrealist, staged photographs, but he also made portraits of the leading lights of the

Downtown scene for publications such as the Soho Weekly News and the East Village Eye.

Peter Hujar (Trenton, NJ, 1934-1987) was a central figure of the group of artists, musicians, writers, and performers at the forefront of New York's Downtown art scene of the 1970s and 1980s. He was admired for his uncompromising attitude towards his work and life. He worked for Harper's Bazaar and GQ, though his legacy lies in the intimate photos he took of his friends and lovers.

Robert Mapplethorpe (Floral Park, NY, 1946-1989) took his first photographs using a Polaroid camera and later became known for his portraits of composers, socialites, porn stars, members of the S&M underground, among an array of others, many of whom were personal friends. He also worked on commercial projects, creating album cover art for Patti Smith and Television, and a series of portraits and party pictures for Interview Magazine.

Paul Mpagi Sepuya (San Bernardino, CA, 1982) uses the studio as the primal site of his practice. He has had a long-standing interest in both the formal construction of the image and of his subject's identity. His photographs often exist in relationship to other photographs he has made: his still-lives are remnants of his studio portrait sessions.

Heji Shin (1976)'s photographs map desire, style, and violence onto the bodies of a unique cast of art and fashion stars. She has made photographs for the best-selling sex education book for teenagers Make Love (2012). Shin's photographs often play with double exposure, and use both analog and digital production.

Laurie Simmons (Long Island, NY, 1949) has steadily produced ambitious and distinctive photo-based work since the mid-1970s. She has continued to craft miniature scenes using iconography from the post-war American culture she grew up in. Her photographs use dolls and dollhouse furniture to reproduce well-known art works with deeply personal implications.

Deborah Turbeville (Stoneham, MA, 1932-2013) was an artist with a radical style that transformed fashion photography. Her soft-focused, pointillist work appeared regularly in American, French and Italian editions of Vogue, Zoom, and French Camera. On her death in October 2013, The New York Times wrote that she, "almost single-handedly turned fashion photography from a clean, well-lighted thing into something dark, brooding and suffused with sensual strangeness."

With thanks to Dianne B and Paul Sinclair

Image:

Jimmy DeSana, Coat Hanger, 1982. Courtesy the Estate of Jimmy DeSana and Salon 94, New York.