

COPENHAGEN

Elina Brotherus

MARTIN ASBAEK GALLERY

"Artist and Her Model," Finnish photographer Elina Brotherus's second solo exhibition in Copenhagen, surveyed a narrow selection of the artist's photographs from 2000 to 2008 and offered a finely wrought miniretrospective. Viewers familiar with her work might have read the title as tongue-in-cheek—since many of her pictures are self-portraits—seeing the show instead as a lineup of greatest hits from a larger archive and, moreover, as the diaristic examination of a persona, simultaneously in front of and behind her camera.

A few examples from her well-known series "The New Painting," 2000–2004, were on view, including one of the only works without Brotherus in it: *Figure au bord de l'eau* (Figure on Waterfront), 2002, which voyeuristically captures a nude man as he quietly ponders the sublime lakeside view before him. Brotherus took classical paintings—some from the Romantic tradition—as inspiration for this series, and Caspar David Friedrich appears as one of her influences. But unlike Friedrich, Brotherus draws attention to the figures in her works as performing staged emotions, echoing the artifice of the image itself and, at times, offering a burgeoning concern for the gaze (male and female). Within a few years, however, with artists such as Justine Kurland and Ryan McGinley expanding and making more ambiguous the relation of figure to landscape in photography, Brotherus too seems to have renewed her exploration of the theme.

Several photographs from the series "Fuji-mi," 2005–, depict the artist in Japan standing before a picture-perfect view of Mount Fuji. In each image, she wears the same blue coat with a fur collar, but she appears in different locations around the circumference of the mountain, looking toward the camera with her back to it and gazing toward the horizon. While these images continue to recall traditional pictorial schemes, they are most interesting when compared with Brotherus's photographs that portray the artist in other landscapes. Take the diptych *Points of View on Landscape 1*, 2006, in which Brotherus shows herself standing directly in front of the camera in a misty Nordic landscape; this was smartly installed in this show in a room adjacent to the "Fuji-mi" works, and the juxtaposition underscored themes of nostalgia and memory running through all her works. With these pictures, the artist departs from her concern with the gaze and staged emotions to focus instead on how longing is connected to and constructed by such sublime, iconic views.

Issues concerning the gaze are taken up again, however, in photographs wherein Brotherus looks neither at a landscape nor toward her camera but directly at another figure in a studio.

Two pictures from the series "*Études d'après modèle, danseurs*" (Model Studies, Dancers), 2007, show the artist watching a male dancer as he stretches and holds a pose. In each image the camera's trip wire is exposed, and the artist's foot rests lightly on it. Strikingly different from the other photographs in the exhibition, these images depict, according to Brotherus, "neither the male gaze nor the female gaze," but "something neutral."

The artist never quite makes good on this assertion; it will take more pictures and at least another exhibition before it becomes clear how Brotherus might incorporate the idea of a neutral gaze more broadly into her work. But the attempt is provocative, even promising.

Elina Brotherus, *Artiste avec danseur en Apollon (Artist with Dancer as Apollo)*, 2007, color photograph mounted on aluminum, 31 1/2 x 37". From the series "*Études d'après modèle, danseurs*" (Model Studies, Dancers), 2007.

