

DUELING DJS: MILES ALDRIDGE ON HIS COLLABORATION WITH MAURIZIO CATTELAN

By Katherine Oktober Matthews, September 22, 2017



English photographer Miles Aldridge (b. 1964) collaborates with Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan (b. 1960) in this new series of photographs, equal parts playful and perplexing. Set in an exhibition of Cattelan's work at the Monnaie de Paris museum, the images bring living nude models together with installations of personas like the pope, a tiny Hitler, and a bumbling representation of Cattelan himself. The grainy black and white images offer us a behind-the-scenes look at their after-hours photoshoot at the museum, working through ideas together with models and crew, while Aldridge's boldly coloured photographs combine sexuality with eccentricity to arrive at overall absurdity. We spoke with Aldridge to learn more about the collaboration, which will be exhibited for the first time at Unseen Amsterdam 2017.

Tell us about the collaboration between yourself and Maurizio Cattelan.

A friend of mine was working with Maurizio on Toilet Paper and through her I sent a message to him telling him how much I loved what he was doing with his magazine. He was playing with a similar aesthetic to my work, which I would describe as a kind of twisted, pop, advertising slickness. Maurizio then sent me an email by reply and we began a conversation about art and photography. I proposed the idea of some kind of duelling DJ collaboration and one day he sent me a message proposing that his exhibition in Paris would make a brilliant setting for my pictures. I visited the exhibition and was inspired not only by Maurizio's installation but also by the new-classical aesthetic of the museum. I imagined nude muses from the age of Ingres interacting with Maurizio's sculptures. I drew up my ideas and sent them to Maurizio...he liked them and so it was agreed we would spend an evening together at the museum making pictures.

How did you approach the creation of the scenes once you arrived to the installation?

My nude muse evolved into a kind of Clockwork Orange femme fatale and for each of Maurizio's sculptures I suggested a pose to counter the narrative of his work. Maurizio would study the Polaroids with me and suggest different angles and ideas.

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The absurdity of the scenes certainly makes it appear fun, but was it fun to create or mostly hard work? What's your preferred formula for a successful photoshoot?

It was fun although by the end I was so tired as we had worked all through the night from 7pm till 7am while the museum was closed. I wish I had a formula for successful images! How the images reveal themselves is always a kind of mystery. I make a lot of preparatory drawings and testing concepts, but it is not until I am looking through my camera that all the elements come together and make sense to me.

Cattelan's bumbling men are offset by your strong, nude, physically idealistic female models. What is your goal in creating this dialogue?

Maurizio's medium is the 'self portrait' while I prefer to tell my story through a female protagonist. I'm fascinated by this kind of goddess muse figure who has been used in the history of Art since the first classical nudes in around 5th century BC and in cinema since the first silent movies.

What was for you the most interesting aspect of working in collaboration with another artist?

What was so inspiring was how generous Maurizio was both in trusting me with his work but also in pushing me to go further with my own work. He suggested many ideas while we worked. He proposed that I shoot the Pope from high above which was a great idea.

Considering your photographs often dance over the boundary between fashion and art, what do you consider the greatest motivating force in creating your work?

I love the history of fashion photography; Newton, Avedon and Penn created amazing, inspiring images in the pages of Vogue. I also love the paintings of Lucas Cranach, Leonardo Da Vinci and Botticelli to name just three heroes, and all these painters dressed their heroines in fashion and gave them hair styles to help express the ideas in their paintings. Fashion has been intertwined with Art since the beginning. With my work I believe no one ever looks at the pictures for the clothes.