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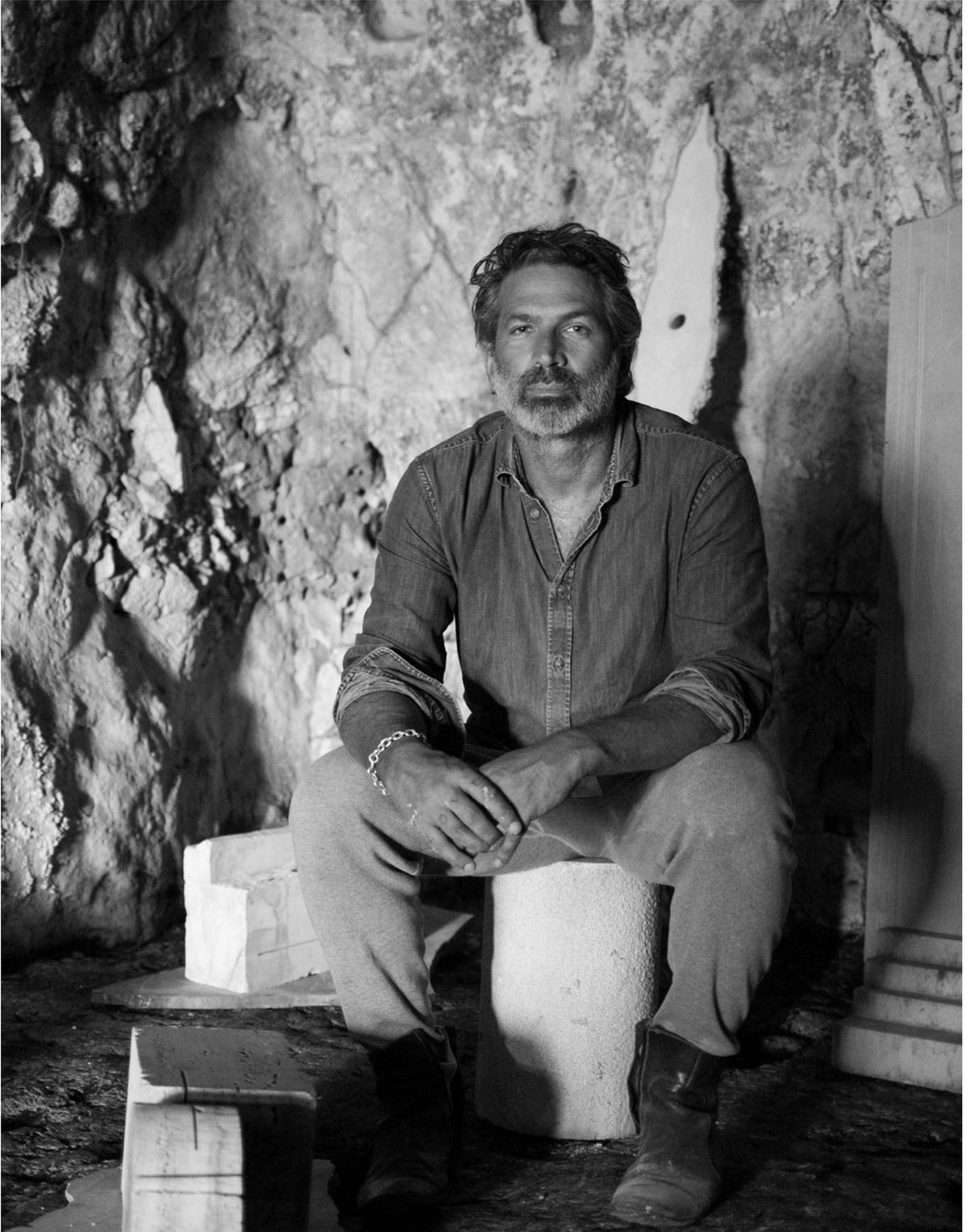
NO 27 PERFORMANCE



ADAM BROOMBERG CARLOS MARTIEL KUDZANAI CHIURAI MARY SIBANDE MIKHAEL SUBOTZKY NOBUKHO NQABA SUE WILLIAMSON FRANZ XAVER MESSERSCHMIDT
TONY GUM ALEC SOTH ALEX PRAGER CALIDA RAWLES JEFF WALL JESSICA LANGE MARILYN MINTER MALICK SIDIBÉ MICHAEL AVEDON RASHAAD NEWSOME
VINCE ALETTI ZANELE MUHOLI CHARLIE ENGMAN DEANA LAWSON GAURI GILL JILL GREENBERG LUCAS BLALOCK BEEPLE SANDRO MILLER THOMAS STRUTH

ADAM BROOMBERG

RAW AND BARE



Adam Broomberg in his Sicily studio, photographed by Melissa Carnemolla.

TERRENCE PHEARSE: *Talk to us about the process of picking up a camera and falling in love again after 30 years. Did you find artistic freedom in creating Glitter in My Wounds singularly after such a long artistic collaboration?* **ADAM BROOMBERG:** Those are two big questions. Let me try and break them down or mix them up. Just a year ago, maybe a little more, just ended a 23-year collaboration with Oliver Chanarin. For the better part of half of that collaboration, we were on the road. We were carrying a large format analog camera through all the places that you would imagine a documentary camera would go. From a refugee camp in Burundi - I remember August 2000, 4 years after the Rwanda genocide - in Uganda, in Burma, on the border of Thailand and Burma, Lebanon, to conflict zones. We were in Afghanistan in 2003, we were in Iraq in 2005, and then prisons, an endless number of prisons. Prison in Mexico, in Sinaloa, the home of the cartel. While it was this kind of dizzying, very adrenalized, unbelievable experience to witness the extremity of joy and suffering of the human condition, also, just to be able to witness that around the world is a remarkable thing. When I look at the outcome of that stuff, of that work, it's not something I feel proud of. In fact, it really disturbs me very deeply. I remember Susan Sontag talking about photography, essentially the camera making everyone a tourist in other people's reality. The quote reads, "But essentially the camera makes everyone a tourist in other people's reality, and eventually in one's own." This is something I read really early on and I really relate to that statement. I think particularly the way our working process was, we would spend three weeks, a month, in each of those communities or those places I described. I don't remember having a conversation of more than 15 minutes with any one of our subjects. Just picture the scenario, two white men carrying a large format camera, which is technology so associated with colonial expansion, policing, cataloging - all the toxicity of literally 19th century and then early 20th century photography. Ultimately, I think, although we did have a kind of thesis or hypothesis in our mind that we were studying the workings of these gated communities, I think the process really just reinforced or doubled down or repeated the toxic power dynamic, the one way flow of power that photography suffers on, which is, all the power lies in the hands of the photographer and the subject is excluded from the narrative, the economic political, and cultural product that is a result of that. Although we collaborated so well, Olly and I. We really did, but we never really collaborated with the subject of our images. When you say falling in love with a medium, again I would correct it. I don't think I was ever in love with a medium. I think I never really enjoyed it. I enjoyed so many things, but I never really enjoyed the process of that type of photographing. I think the difference is, with the book, it felt like a true collaboration. **TERRENCE:** *All 100 photographs were made during a 9-hour period and shot on 5x4 negatives. What was the metamorphosis through light or life that you wanted to portray by using mirrors and sunlight?* **ADAM:** The whole shoot took place over nine hours, nine very intense hours. To the point where Gigi, who's the subject of all 100 odd pictures, is an experienced actress and she directed me. Not only was it more collaborative, it was, if anything, a kind of reversal of power. Also, the book was kind of framed around a poem by the poet C.A. Conrad. There were these three very different characters. This white cis hetero man who came with a whole lot of baggage in terms of the medium. I can't speak for C.A. or for Gigi, but definitely different relationships with their identities, different struggles. I think that this kind of triangle created an interesting minestrone. Truly, although the shoot took nine months, it took a

year of percolating and just sitting for it to emerge and to warrant becoming something in both exhibition and book form. **TERRENCE:** *What does the poem mean in relation to the context of the series, and how was C.A. Conrad a collaborator?* **ADAM:** I think the series doesn't exist without the poem. And in a way, although the poem existed before the series, it's in its book form the way it's broken up and emphasizes that both the concrete poetry style of the way C.A. lays out their poems. But also, I guess, the ritual, it's not ritual like. It's definitely a series of rituals which they use to create the poem which changes the images, the images change the text. There's a fundamental relationship between those two. And in the exhibition, the photographs are accompanied by Gigi attempting or reading but attempting over and over again to get it better, reading the poem. And that comes from a source hidden behind the images, not behind, but behind an adjacent wall. So this feeling like a performance is going on and it's not quite perfect. Gigi's voice is just exquisite, she sounds like Nico after 20 packets of cigarettes. My meeting with C.A., and we've never met in person, I was introduced to C.A. by an artist called Jason Dotru who also runs a small poetry publishing house. **TERRENCE:** *How did accident and improvisation provide a space to confront the restrictive categories that pervade art, life, and identity?* **ADAM:** I think it's very much about identity, and I think the whole book is about that. I think, there's a curious triangle again between CA's queer and non-binary position, between Gigi's transgender identity and what she's been through and is still going through, what CA has been through and is still going through, and what I'm going through and how we affected each other in these little ways. But I think this poem talks about... Let me just pause for a minute. I think the poem... I am a straight cis man. I think there's elements of me that are definitely queer. But there are elements of defiance which I really relate to in the poem, which are the grit and the courage needed to live a queer life. The line, "You think Oscar Wilde was funny. Well darling, I think he was busy distracting straight people so they would not kill him." Then the way the poem ends, which is, "My friend Mandy calls after a long shift at the strip club to say, 'While standing in line for death, I am fanning my hot pussy with your new book. Will you sign it next week my fearless faggot sister?'" And there's just a kind of almost comic self-referential. But also, there's something about the, wouldn't call it bond, but there's something that CA, Gigi, and me, and I hope I'm not being presumptuous, but we are of a similar age and I think we all experienced this idea of being on the periphery or being somehow on the outside. It's almost as if I could have met CA and I could have met Gigi many times in many places at 4:00 in the morning. It's that kind of fine salvation as not a member of the mainstream, and I think we share that relationship. **TERRENCE:** *I'd like to hear about how you met Gigi [Gersande Spelsberg], and how your purview of Helmar Lerski's work converged once you met.* **ADAM:** First of all, just to say, we met on Tinder. And we met with no intention of doing any work together. But we weren't on a date but landed up talking and found so much in common that it was almost immediately that we were excited by potential things to do together, work together. One of the things, you have these projects that you just carry in the back of your mind and they just simmer and sit there. And eventually they just, I don't know, find a little gap. And someone helps you make that and it just pops out. But I was introduced to Helmar Lerski by the curator now of the Pompidou who curated our show. Now, Florian Ebner, he used to run the Museum Folkwang and he got the museum to acquire a set of a piece of work by Helmar Lerski made in 1936 called *Metamorphosis by Light*. **TERRENCE:** *How do you see the subject and object coming together*



Adam Broomberg, *Glitter in My Wounds #8*, 2021. © Adam Broomberg; Courtesy of the artist and Signs and Symbols, New York.



Adam Broomberg, *Glitter in My Wounds #9*, 2021. © Adam Broomberg; Courtesy of the artist and Signs and Symbols, New York.

through the mechanics of repetition in these photographs? **ADAM:** These pictures, if I could just describe them to you, I think he shot a couple of hundred, but ultimately, he chose about 75 or so. They shot on 8 x 10, they were photographed on the balcony of an apartment in Palestine. So, it's 1936 then called Palestine now it's Tel Aviv in a place some people would call Israel. But the images are very, very unique. And part of it is the choice of subject, but more than anything is the mechanism Lerski used to light it. Which is to surround his subject with a series of mirrors and use sunlight, which is very strong but coming from all different angles. What it does is it accentuates the sculptural, the materialist properties of a face. And he chose a very angular, I guess, sculptural face. You've never quite seen anything like it, I had never. **TERRENCE:** *How did the binary position of August Sander relate to the work? And what were the limitations of Sanders' practice that you felt Lerski's viewpoint opened up?* **ADAM:** When I started finding out about it, that Lerski was a contemporary of August Sander, then I was doubly shocked because, of course, Sander has come to embody the humanist idea of the ultimate portrait, which is the full body portrait or slightly closer up. But the portrait portrays the essential elements of the sitter. It's basically a survey of Weimar Republic Germany, but broken down into these subjects according to what people do, so sometimes their employment or there's the brick layer. But then there's very strange things like the artist's wife. It moves, in hindsight, when you look at it, it starts with the banker and it ends towards the end of the series with the vagrant and the Vagabond and the homeless. So there's a strange moral hierarchy that I don't think was intended but unfortunately, ultimately fits quite neatly into the Nazi eugenic notion of how to categorize. So that is deeply unfortunate. But there was also something that always bothered me a bit about August Sanders's work, which is how it's just seen as such hollowed, perfect portraiture. In fact, when you compare it to Lerski and you listen to the way Lerski talks about pictures in such a materialist way, he literally talks about skin on bone rendered with light, as if he's dealing with a sculptural object or made of stone. And I don't think it's a coincidence that he was just written out of history because pretty much nobody knows about him. Even though his genius is quite apparent, both in a conceptual and aesthetic way and he also went on to become, well he was Fritz Lang's director of photography, he shot Metropolis. So an incredibly talented person, but it is worth thinking through why he's been written out of the history of photography. I would argue that that position was just too radical and still perhaps is too radical. I became obsessed with this series of pictures, and in the back of my mind was always wanting to find somebody to reenact, but in a different way, that series of pictures. **TERRENCE:** *Lerski remarked, "The lens does not have to be objective, the photographer can be, with the help of light. [to work freely, characterize freely, according to their inner face]." How have you used light to be objective in the making of this work with Gigi?* **ADAM:** So, then it slightly kind of dawned on me and I spoke to Gigi and we looked at the work and I just realized that Gigi was the perfect person to do this with. Not only because of the structure of her face, but also the so interesting twists it brought up on the notion of identity. Whereas we look at the ultra-conservatism of August Sander who is not only so binary, but divides society into this clear hierarchy, as opposed to Lerski who deals almost like a sculpture or even a surgeon would deal with a body. And I think Gigi being transgender, being an activist, and also an actress and model brought something entirely different to that space because as Gigi explained her experience of transitioning: it was very interesting for me, because I've never really understood it in the notion of body dysmorphia and



Adam Broomberg, *Glitter in My Wounds #10*, 2021. © Adam Broomberg; Courtesy of the artist and Signs and Symbols, New York.



Adam Broomberg, *Glitter in My Wounds #11*, 2021. © Adam Broomberg; Courtesy of the artist and Signs and Symbols, New York.

the surgical procedures. And in order to render, in order to create an image of oneself, which is what photography's all about. So, it was almost as if we spoke about how Gigi had already engaged aesthetic strategies to create the outward appearance of the self. But then, so I brought in that complexity, but then there was something else which is, I felt that Lerski was like almost devoid of emotion, just treating it as a materialist kind of conceptual, bestial project, and August Sander was too much in the land of nostalgia and... beauty in a way, you know, summary. And what I really wanted to do with Gigi was to do a similar thing, do these hundred odd pictures, also in large formats, also lit with sun and sunlight, but to try and evoke small, minute, tiny different emotional responses in the face, through the tiniest of muscle movements. You know those things that we can't help giving away. **TERRENCE:** *I'd like to hear more about your collaboration while making the pictures.* **ADAM:** So we worked for nine hours. First, I constructed about a five-hour recording, going from things like a baby being born, to a car crash, to a sound of a gerbil drowning in mud to whatever. All these sound effects, hoping that if I just played that it would evoke something, but that didn't work. And then slowly, almost Gigi taught me, kind of directing. And then at one point I was like, "Okay, I want you to close your eyes, and just bring into the room somebody, the closest person to you, the person you loved the most who passed away and just bring them in here". And, she took her time and she opened her eyes and it was clear that she was in that space, and that person was there, and there was genuine grief. And then I quickly said, okay, now I want you..." And she said, "Ah, like don't take me to that place". And then, "No?", then tell me, "there's a fire. Run down the stairs" as a joke. This is serious stuff. But I do hope that that is evident. Those kind of minute changes, but they're not just changes of angle or things. They're emotional shifts. **TERRENCE:** *The photographs in the exhibition at signs and symbols gallery are all unframed C-Type*



hand prints, which in a way read like a film. By way of the quantity and quality of your photographic process, these formally simple images taken at close range appear like a forensic examination through light, mirrors, and performance. **ADAM:** It's all a performance. And I think the fact that Gigi is a performer and there's a kind of this thing, although it was a very meaningful, beautiful, almost kind of spiritual nine hours and we were all exhausted in just the right way. No, I mean, you can't tell anything about Gigi from those pictures, even if she was more stripped bare than she ever normally is. Being an actress, Gigi, she's never without her hair or make-up done or costume. And so, this was also a new kind of quite raw experience for her.



Adam Broomberg, *Glitter in My Wounds #13*, 2021. © Adam Broomberg; Courtesy of the artist and Signs and Symbols, New York.